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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee

Augusta SBC 150th celebration
yields 'A Time to Remember'

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
5/12/95

AUGUSTA, Ga. (BP)--Dramatic presentations, historical interpretations, sermons and a declaration of repentance were among highlights of a May 8-10 celebration in Augusta, Ga., of the 150th anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Sponsored by the SBC Historical Commission and the Southern Baptist Historical Society, it drew nearly 900 to a special worship evening May 9 at First Baptist Church and more than 300 registered for the full three days of activity. The actual date of the birth of the SBC was May 8, 1845 at First Baptist Church when it was located in downtown Augusta.

At the Tuesday evening service, Charles B. Bugg, pastor of Provident Baptist Church, Charlotte, N.C., brought a sermon recalling Jesus' response to his disciples the night before he died. Using Jesus' words, "this do in remembrance of me," Bugg suggested Southern Baptists would do well to remember their past and the admonition of Jesus in looking to the future. Bugg was pastor of the historic Augusta congregation in the mid-1980s.

The evening event was a showcase of Southern Baptists' top officials bringing greetings and remembrances, including James T. Draper Jr., president of the Baptist Sunday School Board; Morris H. Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee; Bob White, executive director, Georgia Baptist Convention; and Jim Henry, Orlando, Fla., pastor and president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

A "Declaration of Repentance and Rededication" was read by the congregation and led by Slayden Yarbrough, chairman of the Historical Commission board of trustees who was elected May 8 as interim executive director of the commission. The declaration spoke of the issue of "slavery and the defense of the right to own slaves" as a contributing factor in the founding of the convention in 1845. The declaration pledged "ourselves to repentance in order to commit ourselves to be agents of Christ's reconciling peace and to combat publicly the sins of racism and exclusion in our communities."

In conclusion, the declaration said, "It is our fervent hope and prayer that by acknowledging and repenting of the sins of our past we will be freed to live in justice and peace in th present."

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Girls-in-Action and Royal Ambassador youth collected an offering from the congregation, about \$900, which was forwarded to the Home Mission Board for African American Baptist mission work.

Although much of the celebration was held at the large facility of First Baptist, on the outskirts of Augusta, the final session May 10 was held on the site of the actual founding of the SBC. A new Southern Baptist congregation, GraceWay Church, is meeting at the downtown site in an ornate structure built in 1902.

Several dramatic presentations were featured during the celebration, including two by Mayrene Bobbitt, Jacksonville, Fla., one portraying blind composer Fanny Crosby and one as the mother and wife of famed Baptist hymnwriter B.B. McKinney. Freddie Neel, North Augusta, S.C., brought a portrayal of Annie Armstrong, early Woman's Missionary Union leader and namesake for the SBC's home missions offering. Quinn Pugh, executive director of the New York Baptist Convention, depicted early Baptist leader William B. Johnson.

Audiences also had chances to dialogue with eminent Southern Baptist historians who brought interpretations of the 150 years of the SBC. Jesse Fletcher, chancellor of Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Texas, and author of a recent history of the SBC's first 150 years, brought a message on "Shapers of the Southern Baptist Spirit." Marty Bell, associate professor of religion, Belmont University, Nashville, Tenn., spoke on "The Beginnings of the SBC." Leon McBeth, distinguished professor of church history, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, spoke on "Cooperation and Crisis as Shapers of Southern Baptist Identity." And Yarbrough, church history professor at Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, spoke of "The Southern Baptist Spirit, 1945-1995."

The celebration concluded with a panel which dialogued with the audience following a presentation, "Heritage and Hope: Lessons of Our Past for the Future." Members of the panel included Dellanna O'Brien, executive director of the Woman's Missionary Union; Emmanuel McCall, pastor, Christian Fellowship Baptist Church, Atlanta; William Harrell, pastor, Abilene Baptist Church, Augusta; and Carol Woodfin, history instructor, Palm Beach Atlantic College, West Palm Beach, Fla.; and moderator Yarbrough.

A new Historical Commission-sponsored video of the SBC's 150 years, "One Sacred Effort," was premiered at the May 8 session. Lynn E. May Jr., retiring executive director of the commission, was also honored for his 39 years of service with the agency.

Interspersed in the three days were business sessions for the Historical Commission board of trustees and its auxiliary, the Southern Baptist Historical Society.

The sesquicentennial celebration of the SBC will continue at the annual meeting of the convention in Atlanta, June 20-22, where major presentations are planned on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings in the Georgia Dome.

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Indiana board affirms Mohler
and his vision for Southern

By Tammi Ledbetter

Baptist Press
5/12/95

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--Encouraging Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President R. Albert Mohler Jr. "to pursue with renewed energy the vision God has given him" for the seminary, the executive board of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana passed a resolution May 12 affirming Mohler's leadership regarding recent faculty decisions.

David Wood of Floyds Knobs, Ind., introduced the resolution near the close of the board's regular spring meeting. The resolution took note of the "critical response" Mohler has received from present and former faculty members, leaders of local Presbyterian and Disciples of Christ seminaries, and "some state Baptist editors" who "have been harsh in their public criticisms of Dr. Mohler's action in these matters."

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The statement expressed approval of Mohler's leadership and recent actions, which include the dismissal of the dean of the Carver School of Church Social Work, Diana R. Garland, in a dispute in which he refused to approve a prospective faculty member who holds a view that a woman can be a church's senior pastor.

The Indiana statement encouraged Mohler "not to alter his course because of human pressure alone, but to pursue with renewed energy the vision God has given him for Southern Seminary." Also in the resolution, board members praised seminary trustees for "their steadfast stand with the president" and called on "all who remain in employment to adopt this vision for themselves so that both in fact and in spirit they may all work in harmony with the trustees and their president." The board pledged prayer and support "to that end."

The statement also noted Mohler's "faithful leadership" at the seminary and commended his public stand against a city ordinance that would have granted special rights and protections for homosexuals.

The resolution passed with only one of the 25 members present dissenting. Following the vote, Opal Bowles of Jeffersonville, Ind., was given an opportunity to express the reason for her dissent. She told the board that her church at Clarksville, Ind., had employed many "wonderful ministers" from Southern Seminary who held "a lot of different ideologies, different viewpoints," including David Garland who now serves on Southern's faculty, along with his wife, Diana.

She praised the ministry of the Garlands which she has observed for 23 years, while acknowledging there may have been just cause for firing the former social work dean. "We have come to a point where we cannot tolerate a single dissention of viewpoint among fellow Southern Baptist brothers or sisters," Bowles said.

Board chairman Clarence Brock of Yorktown, Ind., later expressed his appreciation for the vote affirming Mohler's leadership. "I believe that when we elect someone to a position they need to know that they have our support. My contacts with Dr. Mohler lead me to believe that he's the kind of man that we can trust in the position where he's been placed."

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Dole, Gramm hold keys
to Foster confirmation

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
5/12/95

WASHINGTON (BP)--Henry Foster's chances of being confirmed as surgeon general may depend on the willingness of two leading Republican presidential candidates to stand their ground.

Now that it appears Foster has a majority in a U.S. Senate confirmation vote on the floor, only blocking actions by either Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole, R.-Kan., or Sen. Phil Gramm, R.-Texas, apparently will be able to halt the nominee. Dole, the leader for the GOP presidential nomination in early polls, has said he may refuse to schedule a floor vote. Gramm, who trails Dole dramatically in the polls, has promised to filibuster if the nomination reaches the floor. Sixty votes are required to end a filibuster, which is a strategy used by a member to delay or prevent a vote.

Foster, whose nomination has been ensnared in controversy over abortion and other issues since President Clinton chose him in early February, gained support in his hearing before the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee May 3-4. This success was achieved in spite of his acknowledgement he opposed laws requiring parental involvement before a minor's abortion and despite his failure to satisfy the concerns of some Republicans on the committee.

A committee vote may occur within two weeks, and Foster already has at least half of the committee on his side. After the hearing, Republican James Jeffords of Vermont said he would support the nominee. His vote, plus those of seven Democrats, gives Foster commitments from half of the 16-member committee.

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It is possible either the chairman of the committee, Nancy Kassebaum, R.-Kan., or Foster's fellow physician from Tennessee, Sen. Bill Frist, R.-Tenn., or both, also will vote in the affirmative. It appears the committee will recommend Foster with at least a 9-7 vote, a Republican Senate staff member said.

In the full Senate, Foster has at least 51 votes, if all 46 Democrats stick by him. Five Republicans -- Ben Campbell of Colorado, John Chafee of Rhode Island, Bob Packwood of Oregon, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania and Jeffords -- have announced their support for the Nashville physician and medical college administrator, The Washington Times reported May 10.

The central question in the confirmation battle may be: If Dole allows it on the floor, will Gramm have enough votes to sustain a filibuster? Some Republicans have indicated they think Foster probably should have a floor vote, even if they plan to vote against his confirmation. If the nomination reaches the floor, it will be at least June before a vote is taken.

Pro-life and pro-family organizations remain opposed to Foster's confirmation. James A. Smith of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission said he believes "there is a strong chance" Foster will be confirmed.

"I believe the Senate GOP is demonstrating that it is uncomfortable 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," he said, repeating a comment he made when Foster was nominated.

Richard Land, the CLC's executive director, announced the agency's opposition to Foster's confirmation in a late-February news conference in Nashville, Tenn., joined by SBC President Jim Henry.

"This should not be a hard vote for any senator who says he or she cares about the direction of our culture," said Smith, who encouraged Southern Baptists to ask their senators to vote against confirmation. "As controversial as Joycelyn Elders was, pro-life and pro-family Americans will be equally outraged by the policies Foster will pursue as surgeon general."

The president nominated Foster after firing Elders in December. Clinton removed Elders, an African American like Foster, after learning she had made comments seemingly in support of teaching masturbation. It was the final controversy in Elders' stormy 15-month tenure as surgeon general.

Foster served as dean of the school of medicine and acting president at Meharry Medical College in Nashville but was on sabbatical at the time of his nomination by Clinton. Before the hearing, several conservative senators announced opposition to Foster on the basis of such issues as:

- changing accounts of how many abortions he has performed;
- distribution of condoms and other contraceptives to minors without parental consent in his highly touted "I Have a Future" teen-age pregnancy prevention program;
- his participation on boards for an organization, the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, which opposes any restrictions on abortion;
- his supervision of a study in which more than 50 women had abortions by use of experimental vaginal suppositories;
- his sterilization of mentally impaired women in the 1970s;
- questions about when he knew of the infamous experiments on black men with syphilis at Tuskegee, Ala.

Foster's responses on some issues failed to satisfy several of the committee's Republican members, as well as pro-life advocates.

Sen. Barbara Mikulski, D.-Md., asked the obstetrician/gynecologist if he thought a teen-ager should be required to have parental consent or involvement before having an abortion.

"I do not. I do not," he said. While he encourages parental involvement in a teen's abortion decision, he does not require it, Foster said.

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Afterward, Family Res arch Council President Gary Bauer said, "In any reasonable world, that should doom his confirmation," The Washington Times reported. Polls show more than 70 percent of Americans favor laws requiring parental involvement in a minor's abortion decision.

Sen. Dan Coats, R.-Ind., especially was dissatisfied with Foster's responses to questions about the government's syphilis experiment. Foster said he learned in 1972 about a 40-year study by the Public Health Service in which hundreds of black men with syphilis were studied while being unnotified and untreated. If anyone at Tuskegee had known about the experiment, it would have been angrily disclosed, Foster testified.

Foster was vice president of the county medical society and chief of obstetrics in a Tuskegee hospital.

Coats read from several documents in which medical officials said the county medical society and school knew about the experiment before 1972. He asked Foster, "What would you do if you were me ... and your staff presented you with all of this testimony, all of these documents of respected individuals" saying the study was disclosed?

"This was clearly a dastardly experiment conducted under the auspices of the United States government, and (that) someone would have the audacity to try to put that on the black people of Tuskegee beggars description," Foster said.

Is he saying the statements in the documents are incorrect? Coats asked Foster.

"Under oath, incorrect, wrong, wrong, wrong, sir," Foster said in a loud voice.

After the hearing, Coats said in a prepared statement, "The chairman of the Centers for Disease Control, the president of the county health association, a federal deposition from a former colleague -- they all indicate that they informed Dr. Foster's medical society about the syphilis study. Dr. Foster's claim that he did not know about this study again calls into question his candor and his credibility."

Kassebaum questioned Foster on the "I Have a Future" program and seemed less than content with its claims to success in preventing teen pregnancy. A review by Meharry, obtained by the committee a few days before the hearing, failed to support assertions the program had reduced pregnancy.

On the issue of sterilization, Foster testified he received parental approval before sterilizing four mentally impaired women whom he cited in a mid-1970s speech.

In his opening statement, Foster described himself as a "doctor who delivers babies." He said he supports the president's position that abortion should be "safe, legal and rare." In explaining why the number of abortions he said he had performed had gone from one to no more than 12 to 39, Foster said it was a mistake for him to guess without reviewing the records. He did not intend to deceive questioners, Foster said.

Given the opportunity to lead off for the committee as he had requested, Frist, who was elected in November, said the hearing should not be a time to "revisit our national policy on abortion."

Later, Frist's comments and questions seemed so helpful to Foster's cause that Sen. Paul Simon, D.-Ill., said, "If Senator Frist wants another couple of minutes, I would yield to him."

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Zairian Baptists ask
for prayer in epidemic

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KIKWIT, Zaire (BP)--Baptists in Zaire have requested prayer in the outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus that has struck the villages of Kikwit and Musango in east-central Zair and killed as many as 100 people.

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The headquarters for the Baptist convention related to Southern Baptists is located in Kikwit, a city of 600,000 people 370 miles east of Kinshasha, the capital city. The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board is monitoring the outbreak and will respond to unmet human needs it discovers, said FMB spokesman Jim Foster.

No Southern Baptist missionaries have been assigned to Zaire since February 1993. Southern Baptist missionaries also are no longer assigned to Rwandan refugee camps located in Zaire.

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New Orleans churches, seminary
survey sudden downpour damages

By Steve Achord

Baptist Press
5/12/95

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--The sun shone whimsically through the stained glass windows of Edgewater Baptist Church sanctuary. Hiding the dark blue carpet and covering the foot pedals of a recently installed \$30,000 organ was a foot of water gently lapping at the seats of the pews.

Toys and preschool literature floated in classrooms as Lynnde Harmon, the church's preschool director, pushed gallons of water down a hall and outside the building toward water-stained playground equipment.

Under gray skies May 9, church members, neighbors and friends in the New Orleans area arrived to remove water, mud and floating debris from numerous churches in the wake of heavy rains and high winds left from a May 8 deluge. Record-setting rainfall in many areas in and around New Orleans left dozens of churches like Edgewater crippled.

"A lot of folks are still in shock," said J.R. Blakeney, director of church programs for the Baptist Association of Greater New Orleans.

Following the storm, Blakeney has been trying to reach pastors and other church leaders to assess the damage and determine the needs in each church.

The newly completed sanctuary of the Good Shepherd Spanish Mission -- awaiting dedication services in a few weeks -- as well as the pastor's home and other churches -- experienced flooding and wind damage, Blakeney said.

As is the case at Edgewater, several churches are without flood insurance, prompting the need for help with cleanup, repairs, equipment, literature replacement and financial contributions, Blakeney said. "It's those churches without a large financial base we're concerned about," he said. "Senior adult or work teams are needed to come in to help."

Church clean up in some cases is slow due to heavy devastation in members' homes in neighborhoods around churches.

Louisiana Baptists' large feeding unit has begun serving meals at First Baptist Church, Slidell, on May 10. A second Louisiana disaster relief unit has been assigned to West St. Charles Baptist Church, Boutte, while the New Orleans association's feeding unit is at First Baptist, Chalmette.

Pastor Vicente Maldonado waded through knee-deep water surveying water lines that at the height of flooding had covered his desk and keys to the church piano. Swollen and firmly locked in place, the only sounds he heard from the piano was the dripping of water onto the flooded floor as it tried to dry itself out.

Maldonado's church, Latin American Temple, located in the rear of its sponsoring church, Central Baptist Church near Carrollton Avenue, has flooded before, but not to this extent, Maldonado said of the four feet of water left in his church.

Despite the loss of equipment and many of his personal books and commentaries, Maldonado was undaunted by the high water and said he would begin again in a church where he was been pastor nearly 12 years.

On the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary on Gentilly Boulevard, tree limbs were down and water leaks and electrical outages occurred in some buildings, closing the campus May 9 and 10.

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But the hardest-hit area was at one of the seminary's off-campus apartments where 30 downstairs apartments had up to 14 inches of water in them, said Becky Brown, seminary director of housing.

"As much damage in my opinion as Hurricane Andrew, definitely more water," Brown said of the Gentilly Apartments, located about three miles from the campus.

Nearly 75 percent of the members of Airline Baptist Church, Metairie had water in their homes, some up to 18 inches, according to pastor Joseph Vadnais. "Some of the people in the neighborhood waded almost a mile down flooded streets to the church to see how it was affected and what they could do," he said.

Churches wanting to help should contact the Louisiana Baptist Convention or the BAGNO office, Blakeney said.

Following is a list from Blakeney of churches with damage as of May 10. The list may not be complete:

- Edgewater Baptist Church, water damage throughout, damage to organ, hymnals, literature, teaching materials;
- Good Shepherd Spanish Mission, water damage in new sanctuary;
- Airline Baptist Church, flooding;
- Riverside Baptist Church, flooding;
- Crescent City Baptist Church, 2 inches of water in sanctuary, 5 inches in school;
- Celebration Baptist Church, damage to office and sanctuary;
- Elysian Fields Avenue Baptist Church, water on ground floor;
- Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, water on ground floor;
- First Baptist Church, Kenner, water in nursery and sanctuary;
- First Baptist Church, Luling, 2-3 inches of water in sanctuary, damage to sound equipment, piano, and organ, no insurance;
- Metairie Baptist Church, water in church;
- Gentilly Baptist Church, flooding in educational building;
- First Baptist Church, Arabi, roof damage from wind;
- First Baptist Church, New Orleans, water in kitchen;
- First Baptist Church, St. Rose, mud and water damage, lots of children's educational supplies lost;
- Grace Baptist Church, water in pastor's and one other staff member's homes;
- Lake Forest Baptist Church, pastor's home flooded;
- First Baptist Church, Avondale, 18 inches of water in pastor's home;
- Suburban Baptist Church, plate glass baptistry cracked.

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Achord is a staff member at New Orleans Seminary.

New Orleans storm gives
firsthand lesson in caring

By Steve Achord

Baptist Press
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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Sandra and Kenneth McDowell were looking forward to spending more time with their 18-month-old grandson from South Carolina when the rains began pelting their New Orleans apartment on St. Anthony Street May 8.

The McDowells, students at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary who live at the seminary-owned, 64-unit Gentilly Apartments three miles from the campus, were aware of the horrendous thunderstorms in the area, but were given little time to begin stacking personal effects in their home before flood waters trespassed through their front door.

Despite the booming thunder and the rushing around his grandparents and others made in the apartment complex, the baby slept through the night, the couple said.

The rude awakening given by violent weather to the McDowells and thousands of others throughout New Orleans was also greeted by Christian love, concern and assistance from friends, neighbors and complete strangers that night and all day May 9.

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Upstairs neighbors helped downstairs neighbors move furniture and offer a place to sleep, said stranded visitor John Lowe, a seminary student from Montgomery, Ala., who was visiting his finance when the storm hit. "It was like one big family as everyone tried to help one another," he said.

As dawn arrived, hungry residents were greeted with biscuits made by neighbors and friends. Light also brought students, staff and faculty from the main campus to lend a helping hand wherever it was needed. The rigorous job of removing carpet and other items from apartments was done quickly as teams moved in and out of homes helping old friends and newly acquainted friends.

"Form a line," someone shouted as people lined an outdoor corridor leading to a trash truck waiting for the hundreds of yards of soggy carpet. In seconds, wet helpers exploded into action removing carpet and other debris in a giant cleanup effort.

"It's an awesome experience of people helping people, a manifestation of Christian spirit -- looking after your brother," paused Mark Foley, the seminary's vice president for student development and institutional research and planning from his duties of cutting carpet from one of the apartments.

As students slowed down to eat lunch provided by the seminary, students reflected on the tragedy, but were thankful no one was injured from the damage done in the 64 apartments in the complex.

"I stayed in my apartment all night and felt the water slowly creeping up my ankles," said Carolyn McClendon. "Just about everyone in the apartment was affected, either with a flooded apartment or a flooded car," she said.

Jeff Hathorn, an NOBTS bachelor of arts student and a mechanic, spent the day helping others clean water from their cars, using his tool truck, complete with a compressor and wet-vac, to vacuum water out of cars.

Fellow student Jim Caldwell said, "Jeff, is a life saver. I wouldn't be able to clean the water out without his help."

Hathorn also spent time cooking steaks for people who had lost power and food.

Seminary professors Allen Jackson and Tom Roote gave students their wet/dry vacs to clean up damaged apartments and cars. "I have no idea where my vacuum is," Jackson said, "but I'm glad students are able to use it."

Malcolm Byrd, campus police chief, was on duty during the flood and continued to work throughout the next day, assisting students in the clean-up and providing information about the damage. The entire campus police force helped unclog drains and haul away damaged goods.

A few miles away at Edgewater Baptist Church, more than 60 people showed up to remove water from the church that underwent major renovations six years ago, said minister of music and seminary professor Sidney Buckley.

"It was wonderful to see people jump in and help. It is one of those things you hope would happen in a time like this," Buckley said. "A fantastic spirit."

The same cooperative effort and spirit took place at Gentilly Baptist Church where members showed up with fans, mops and wet vacs to remove two inches of water from the education building and other areas of the church. Other members brought in food to feed everyone, said Steve Kavanagh, youth minister.

"You see the spirit of the people of the church when they spontaneously show up to help -- and in a good spirit, too," said Gentilly pastor Eric Reed.

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Photographer and NOBTS student Eric Grizzle contributed to this story. (BP) photos available upon request from New Orleans Seminary.

Texas Baptists challenged
to reach 'beyond these walls' By Laura Horne & Ken Camp

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SAN ANTONIO, Texas (BP)--To reach beyond their sanctuary walls, churches need leaders who are rooted, real, reproducing spiritually and radically committed to Jesus Christ, according to Tom Wolf, professor of missions at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif.

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Wolf spoke to more than 2,000 Texas Baptists attending the first-ever statewide Missions Conference, May 10-11 in San Antonio, challenging them to carry the gospel to the mission field "Beyond These Walls."

The 21st century church must become like the first century church -- holy and apostolic, said Wolf, who served 25 years as pastor of The Church on Brady in east Los Angeles.

The church can reach out effectively only when the world knows it is holy and its leaders are people of integrity, he said. And its members must be apostolic, sharing the gospel with everyone in their circle of influence and building "bridges of life" across cultural barriers.

"Skills once required only on the foreign mission field are now required in our neighborhoods," Wolf said.

"You are what you are. You cannot change that. But you can become a servant wherever you are. And if you serve them, you can win them to Christ."

Joe Ratliff, pastor of Brentwood Baptist Church, Houston, a predominantly black congregation, challenged Texas Baptists to "decrease so God can increase" by going beyond barriers such as sex, color, race, gender and age -- "any barrier that separates us from reaching the people."

"The kingdom of God is not about walls or building. It's about people," Ratliff said.

Pointing out breaking out of walls is risky business, he urged each conference participant to "search your heart to see God has not only called you to preach but to be able to reach people."

Citing new statistics from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, William M. Pinson Jr., executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, said the unchurched population in Texas has topped 10 million.

"Texas is indeed a mission field, but I wonder whose mission field it will be," Pinson said, quoting the late Baker James Cauthen, president of the Foreign Mission Board.

Texas Baptists need to take the gospel to "mission fields within the mission field" -- unchurched segments of the Texas population such as homeless people, illegal aliens and residents of multihousing complexes, he said.

"We must go beyond the walls of our churches to where the people are," he said.

Baptists need to rethink their theology of church in light of the New Testament model, according to Larry Lewis, president of the Home Mission Board.

"Too often we have the mind-set that if it isn't meeting in a church building or if a group isn't at least moving towards owning its own property, it's not really church," he said.

The "small, loving, caring, intimate fellowships" in the New Testament met in homes, owned no property and were not officially constituted, Lewis said. But they were not called cell groups, extension Bible studies or preaching points. They were churches.

"The church facility is good, but only if it doesn't imprison us, walling us up from the world we are commanded to reach," he said.

James Semple, director of the BGCT state missions commission, said Texas Baptists need to dispel two myths -- that Texas is already a Christian state in general and a Baptist state in particular, and it doesn't need any more churches.

"We need more churches and we need them desperately," he said.

Because of the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions, Texas Baptists are able to begin three new churches each week in 28 language groups. But Texans could begin a new church every day, Semple said.

"The only thing that holds us back is financial resources, and God has given Baptists those resources," he said, urging Texans to give to state missions. "The investment you make will never decline in value. What you give for Christ -- that will make dividends forever and ever. We have a special responsibility to reach Texas."

After the conference, Semple said the meeting "exceeded expectations" in encouraging, motivating and providing information to participants about ways to become involved in local missions.

"In particular, the conference focused effectively on the vital role of the laity in Texas mission work," he said. "I believe hearts were ignited at this conference, and the fire will continue to spread to other congregations as participants return home to share with others what they heard."

Esther Burroughs, assistant director for church growth and associational evangelism with the Home Mission Board, interpreted the conference theme, "Beyond These Walls," by telling a story about her granddaughter who came home from church to tell her mother the story of the feeding of the 5,000.

"And there were gobs left over," she exclaimed.

When her mother asked her how she thought that happened, the little girl leaned over to her mother and whispered, "God did it!"

Just as Joshua erected an altar in memory of what God had done for his people, Burroughs encouraged Texas Baptists to make an altar of their lives and their churches before God so they can say, "God did it!"

"An altar denotes a higher authority -- a kingdom authority. God is working today through those who build an altar in their lives," she said.

For Angela Kim of Houston, missions education trainer for Korean Woman's Missionary Union, her spiritual journey began 22 years ago when a Baptist woman went outside the walls of culture and language by inviting her to a Bible study.

"Going beyond walls is God's idea," Kim said. "It's what he demonstrated when Jesus left heaven to enter the world."

Kim's journey of spiritual growth beyond the walls continues as she and her husband work with an Indonesian church in Houston.

"We cannot grow much within our own walls," she said.

Tillier Wesley, a deacon and lay preacher at Fort Worth Indian Baptist Mission, described himself as a product of missions.

"I'd come a long way just to tell you, 'I love Jesus,'" said Wesley, a Creek Indian.

Sometimes God works beyond the walls of his people's wildest expectations, according to Elias Elizondo of Iglesia Bautista El Calvario, Jourdanon, Texas. Last year, Elizondo and his wife noticed a "for sale" sign on a building that had housed a restaurant. Thinking the owner might be willing to rent the facility to El Calvario, he asked the pastor of the mission's sponsoring church to explore that option.

After the Elizondos and others committed the matter to prayer, the owner instead agreed to donate the building which is valued at \$87,000. The mission worshiped in the facility for the first time Feb. 1, holding a prayer meeting.

"It was such a moving service," Elizondo said. "Everybody was crying, thanking the Lord for what he had done."

Christians must not be ashamed to claim the name of Jesus, said John Shelton, pastor of Church on the Lot in southeast Dallas, where he works with the homeless, transients and youth on the streets.

"We should never be ashamed to be Christ Jesus' children. We should never be ashamed of what he has done," he said. "Many times in my past life there has been much sin. There have been many times I have fallen short, but God loved me in those times and I ought not to be ashamed and I should be proud of Christ."

Robert Pride, multihousing consultant, Houston, told how Texas Baptists are making a difference in east Houston. He described a church meeting on a tennis court at an apartment complex and a congregation that meets in a two-bedroom apartment with an attendance of 90.

"We can be an uncommon congregation doing uncommon things for common people if we only allow the will of God to take place," he said.

Eunice Chambless, director, Missions Development Council, Abilene (Texas) Baptist Association, described new initiatives her association is taking, including committees to coordinate work in new areas such as criminal justice, multihousing and lay ministry involvement and development.

"We must go beyond these walls to meet the people who live in the shadows of our churches and will not come in," she said. "People need the Lord."

Letters to SBC stretch
from Bosnia to Apocalypse

By Jon Walker

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Every week people send letters to the Southern Baptist Convention. Their content ranges from a young girl in Florida requesting information about Southern Baptists to a person in Alabama wanting to know what Baptists mean by "once saved, always saved."

Because the SBC technically only exists for three days each June, the letters find their way to the SBC Executive Committee office of convention relations, where the effort begins to get them answered, often by forwarding them to the SBC agency best equipped to respond (i.e., a question about foreign missions would go to the Foreign Mission Board).

Below are some of the more memorable messages. For the most part, the letters have been left as is, rather than corrected for grammar:

-- "Read the Ten Commandments. Part of the reason why people act like they do is that people (who) say they are Christians and say they worship God, also worship gods of this world. For example, people tell their children there's a Santa Claus and Easter bunny. That is wrong"

-- "Please explain in detail, with scripture references, how a person can or cannot lose their salvation."

-- "I am ... concerned with the situation in Bosnia. If a prayer could be said for the people of Bosnia during each of the church services performed the weekend following Thanksgiving maybe the situation would improve and the killing would stop."

-- "We are currently trying to film large groups of people partaking in full-bodied baptism ceremonies. ... I was informed that mass baptisms occur in certain areas of the United States, and we were particularly interested in the mass baptisms that are performed in Moon Lake, Coahoma County, Mississippi."

-- "I would like your interpretation of I Timothy 3:2 and 12. I am writing a term paper on the offices of a New Testament church. What I would like to know is what is the meaning of, 'Husband of one wife... .'"

-- "What does the SBC logo mean?"

-- "I'm sending you this letter in hopes that you can lend me some money You see, I'm suppose to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit real soon Please try to have the money to me by Tuesday, April 19 at the latest. And send it to me by two days priority mail!! And please send it (in the form of three different checks): ... \$500 ... \$1,000 ... \$1,500"

-- "Thanks be to God your Baptist group is doing some things right but concerns of many issues still abound ... Some of the churches thinks some of their inactive still belongs and they no longer want members of the church. All churches needs to call upon inactive members, encourage them to return to the house of worship."

-- "I am a white, Christian male in my thirties, and I am single. I am interesting (sic) in finding couple of large, single ministries that are Southern Baptist churches... ."

-- "Praise God! I got busted! ... I am a Christian inmate in (county jail). Since I've been incarcerated, I've come to my senses, and I've come to the Lord."

-- "Key apocalypse signs: ... 40th President Reagan riding 'out' on a white horse ... Drilling incident in Siberia involving psychic phenomenon and hellish sounds: a great escape from the pit for hosts of demonic spirits ... Iron Curtain falling (Key evidence 1st seal opened) ... Gorbachev sitting in Holy place with Pope Paul" From a letter promoting articles on the Apocalypse.

-- From a letter from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: "Of particular interest is the role of religion in shaping family values. If your church has conducted any research in this area ... we would be interested in learning more about your work."

--more--

-- "It's time to start gathering money to rebuild the Temple of God in Jerusalem. I've written all nations, private corporations, credit unions, etc. I will be able ... to be trusted to handle the money and the work to be accomplished."

-- "I would like to learn about the Southern Baptist Convention. Also, I wonder if you could send me some information about the differences between the Southern Baptist Convention and the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches?"

-- "Our church is deeply concerned about the controversy in the SBC and some of the questions that the Cooperative Fellowship has raised It would be quite helpful if you could outline the position of the SBC on some important questions that our congregation has been asking."

-- "We have a couple getting married and the bride has a Mormon background. Could you send us some material that would relate to her situation?"

-- "My husband's grandfather graduated from Wake Forest in 1892 (and then attended Southern Seminary). I was wondering if you have records on your ministers"

-- From a local AAMCO Transmission dealer: "I deeply regret the necessity of writing you in this request for assistance, but I find no other avenues to pursue. ... we received a call from (a pastor), that his vehicle was broken down nearby. ... (after towing it in, we) checked it thoroughly and found that a fitting was damaged, called him for approval, and repaired and tested it to our satisfaction. ... (although it was contrary to our policy,) I told him I would park his vehicle outside with the keys in it, and he could place the check under the door that night. ... The next day I did not find a check, so I phoned him (long distance and had to call back twice after promises the check was in the mail) ... it is clear to me that (the pastor) has no intention of paying this. ... I honestly wonder if (he) understands the contents of the Ten Commandments."

-- "I have an old Bible that I read from. Some of the pages are missing, and I can't buy a new one. Would you send me a Bible, new or used? This would mean the world to me. I would love the King James version."

-- "I always heard that Jesus condemned homosexuals as an 'abomination,' but someone told me Jesus said nothing of homosexuality in the Bible. He said the issue is mentioned by Paul on one occasion. ... I'd appreciate it very much if you would be so kind as to send any statements on homosexuals by Jesus, or are there any?"

-- "(Below are listed members of the) Lynchburg Va. Cult Crime Ring. (They are identified as the) 'God-they-are' gang. Underworld people. Ain't got caught ... Get an out-of-town cop to investigate it."

-- "It's time for the churches in America to rise to the occasion of our times and take a dominate stand, and speak out publicly, against all the evils subverting our churches and country. How long will we continue to separate religious issues from political agendas? ... Satan, you can have free reign over this entire country; just don't overturn our tax exempt status!"

--30--

CORRECTION: Please make the following corrections to the committee appointments as listed in Baptist Press May 5.

Committee on Committees--In the Oklahoma entry, Sam Hammons is a layman, not minister.

Resolutions Committee--In the Oklahoma entry, Kevin Kilbreath is a minister, not a layman.

Credentials Committee--Also in the Oklahoma entry, Stan Daniel goes by Stanley. Also, please add the name of Bill Stewart, pastor of First Baptist Church, Eupora, Miss., as an addition to the committee .

Thanks,
Baptist Press

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