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May 25, 1995

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CLC consultation yields
proposed stance on racism

By Bill Merrell

Baptist Press
5/25/95

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--In a meeting participants described as "historic," African American and white Southern Baptist leaders discussed ways for the Southern Baptist Convention to deal with the racism of its past and present.

A "Racial Reconciliation Consultation," May 22 in Nashville, Tenn., yielded a resolution it is hoped will "startle the nation and begin our healing" as one of the participants said in his introductory remarks. The meeting, in the offices of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, began with a fellowship meal followed by a lengthy session of corporate prayer, followed in turn by prayer in small groups. "Eating together and praying together," one participant observed, "is a good way for us to begin."

The consultation grew out of conversations between Richard D. Land and Gary Frost regarding the 150th anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention, to be celebrated June 20-22 in Atlanta. Land, CLC executive director, and Frost, pastor of the Rising Star Baptist Church, Youngstown, Ohio, and SBC second vice president, agreed Southern Baptists cannot go to Atlanta without addressing the issue of racism.

"I have had concern for some time that we needed to speak to this issue during the sesquicentennial convention," Land said. "We could not celebrate our past with a clean conscience until we had dealt with this issue.

"In discussing with various leaders how best to address the issue, Gary Frost and I decided in March of this year, during the CLC seminar in Wake Forest, (N.C.,) where Gary was a speaker, that we should hold a consultation on this issue.

"Gary and I decided that we should jointly invite an approximately equal number of African American and anglo Southern Baptist leaders to come to Nashville ... with the goal of producing a statement which we could all enthusiastically support and which could be presented to the convention."

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95-87

The consultation, which stretched into the night, produced a resolution unanimously approved by the 14 participants. It acknowledges the significant role slavery played in the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention. It notes racism continues to harm the body of Christ and Southern Baptists, stating, "... we repent both of conscious and unconscious racism and apologize to all African-Americans for condoning and perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our lifetime." It further asks "forgiveness from our African-American brothers and sisters." The document recognizes that the healing of white Christians is at stake, that racism discredits the gospel, hinders the reconciling work of Christ, and impedes the development of the denomination.

The linking of present-day racism with the historic evil of slavery was clearly delineated in the document, something one participant observed was a new thing in Southern Baptist statements on the matter.

A significant point in the deliberations revolved around the appropriate use of the word "repentance" in the document. Land explained, "As we discussed the issue, the participants agreed we needed to deal with repentance in a biblical, responsible, productive way.

"There are many Southern Baptists, and I include myself among them, who are grieved by the role that racism has played in our denomination's past and who are eager to apologize and ask for forgiveness from our African American brothers and sisters -- but who have grave theological problems with the concept of repenting for the sins of our forbears since we believe that only the individuals who committed the sins can repent for those sins. In other words, we are not Mormons. We cannot, by anything we do, change the status of our forbears before God for their sins.

"Consequently, our statement employs language which allows us to repent of the 'conscious and unconscious sins ... in our lifetime.' We have an obligation and a responsibility to confess our own sin."

Participants characterized the meeting's discussions as frank combined with a spirit of brotherliness. When it was noted the debate on a racial crisis resolution in the 1968 SBC meeting in Houston was divisive and rancorous, and that a replay of that would be most destructive, one participant noted, "This is not the same convention we were in 1968." In connection with that observation, one of the African American participants also noted the Christian Life Commission currently enjoys more popular support and trust than it did at the time of that convention.

Asked about his evaluation of the consultation, Land responded, "Gary and I were delighted that so many of the people we wanted to be present were able to change their schedules and be in Nashville for the consultation." SBC President Jim Henry, of Orlando, Fla., was unable to attend the consultation because of a scheduling conflict which could not be resolved. Henry had sent a letter which was read at the opening in which he affirmed the meeting and promised to pray for its success.

"I believe we all had a profound sense that the Holy Spirit was at work in our midst and that we had been presented with an extraordinary opportunity for healing and reconciliation," Land said. "All participants affirmed the completed document, and I believe that the statement has the potential for healing old and hurtful wounds and for laying a firm foundation for a bright future for multi-racial fellowship, cooperation and ministry."

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Merrell is the CLC's director of media and product development.

17 Baylor alumni ask Sloan
for action on abortion pill

By Art Toalston

WACO, Texas (BP)--The issue of abortion now confronts Robert Sloan as he assumes Baylor University's presidency June 1.

A group of 17 alumni of the Baptist-affiliated university in Waco, Texas, have targeted Houston-based Baylor College of Medicine's testing of the controversial "abortion pill" RU-486 and asked Sloan to distance the university from the medical college.

"We feel that the medical school no longer deserves to bear the name of our great university," the alumni stated in a May 25 news release.

They asked Sloan to initiate two actions after his June 1 inauguration:

-- Discontinue Baylor's appointment of 11 people to the medical college's 44-member board of trustees. Among those 11, the alumni said, are outgoing Baylor President Herbert Reynolds and the chairman of Baylor's board of regents, Gale Galloway.

-- End the medical college's use of "Baylor" in its name. "Baylor University permits the medical school to use the Baylor name, but we know that this contractual agreement is revocable," the alumni said.

Sloan could not be reached for comment May 25.

Signers of the alumni letter include Mike Singletary, NFL Hall of Fame-bound linebacker and two-time Southwest Conference player of the year; Richard Neill, a dentist who led a campaign in the Dallas/Fort Worth area against the daytime airing of the Phil Donahue show, receiving the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission's 1994 distinguished Christian service award; and Chuck Kelley, professor of evangelism at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

"This is not an attack on the Green and Gold," Thomas Goodman, pastor of First Baptist Church, Eastland, Texas, told Baptist Press May 25. The 1982 Baylor grad said all the signees are supportive alumni. "It's not a denominational controversy," Goodman continued. "It's an abortion pill controversy, and nothing more."

Goodman said he initiated the effort to ask Sloan to address the RU-486 testing at the medical college, drafted a proposed letter and incorporated various suggestions from those committing to sign it.

Goodman noted in the letter, "Those who first raised concerns about Baylor College of Medicine and the abortion pill were told that there is no longer a connection between the Houston medical school and Baylor University after the two schools broke their affiliation in 1969.

"But in fact the governing connection is substantial," Goodman wrote, citing Baylor University's appointment of 11 medical college trustees, or one-fourth of the Houston institution's board.

The RU-486 testing at the medical college, in conjunction with Planned Parenthood of Houston, is part of the drug's testing at a dozen sites across the country organized by the New York City-based Population Council, which was given the RU-486 patent by its French maker, Roussel Uclaf.

The alumni group's letter recounted how the drug in the abortion pill works -- "the fetus that is attached to (the nutritive lining of the uterus) is deprived of nutrition and dies" -- and cited news reports of several women and their emotional reactions to the drug's miscarriage-like effects. The pill's success rate is estimated at 96 percent, the letter stated.

Among others signing the letter were Neal Jeffrey, a Dallas-area minister who quarterbacked Baylor's 1974 Southwest Conference championship team; Cecil Taylor, a dean at the University of Mobile in Alabama; and pastors Guy Holloway of Richmond, Va., and Kirby Hill of Baton Rouge, La.

Alabama board questions
Univ. of Mobile audits

By Mark Baggett

MOBILE, Ala. (BP)--The Alabama Baptist Convention's state board of missions has voted to exclude the University of Mobile from the 1996 state budget unless it complies with an agreement from last year's annual convention meeting.

An ad hoc subcommittee that has been studying the university's Latin American Branch Campus (LABC) in Nicaragua recommended the university "not be included in the normal, traditional convention budgeting procedures for 1996" until it submits a report from its auditor saying the audit is based on "all material disclosures required by generally accepted accounting principles" and complying with the subcommittee's report to the convention last November.

The subcommittee's recommendation was approved with one dissenting vote by the state convention's executive committee and then approved 39-31 with one abstention in a ballot vote by the state board of missions in a tension-filled meeting May 19.

Board chairman Edwin Jenkins, pastor of Hilldale Baptist Church in the Birmingham Baptist Association, asked Alabama Baptists to be patient.

"The die is not cast," Jenkins said. "I don't see the university as being eliminated from the budget. The vote is simply based on getting all these things together. The difficulties can be resolved by the July budget hearings, and our attitudes will be a key.

"I have sought to be consistent in applying the same rules to all entities and to adopt an attitude of accepting one another. It is important for us to stay in the posture of 'we' and not 'us versus them.' We need to take out an adversarial attitude and replace it with an attitude of openness; attitudes will have a lot to do with resolving the issue."

The subcommittee, chaired by Huffman Baptist Church associate pastor Glenn Slye, based its recommendation on a compromise agreement reached last November at the convention's annual meeting, in which the state board found the university violated convention bylaws in establishing the LABC. The agreement calls on the university to submit periodic audits of its LABC, to restore any Cooperative Program monies used in the LABC and to indemnify the state convention from liability in connection with the LABC.

But Slye said two letters from the university's auditors raised questions about the university's disclosures to the auditors and about the university's efforts to correct certain accounting procedures.

One letter -- a Sept. 16, 1994, "management letter" from the Mobile firm of Deloitte & Touche -- summarizes "reportable conditions" in the university's financial statements. "Reportable conditions involve matters coming to our attention relating to significant deficiencies in the design or operation of the internal control structure that, in our judgment, could adversely affect the university's ability to record, process, summarize, and report financial data consistent with the assertions of management in the financial statements," the letter reads.

Another letter, dated April 21, 1995, by the university's current auditors -- Wilkins Miller of Mobile -- to the university's board of trustees, notes: "Management has elected to omit substantially all of the disclosures required by generally accepted accounting principles. If the omitted disclosures were included with the statement of unrestricted fund revenues, expenditures, and other changes, they might influence the user's conclusions about the branch campus's results of operations."

Slye said the university could not be in compliance with the convention agreement until these questions were resolved.

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"We have heard the university's call for 'closure' to this process," Slye said. "But the agreement reached last November clearly states that only compliance brings closure. And compliance means compliance by both parties -- by the university in giving the reports and by the state board in receiving the reports and making sure they are right. When we saw these letters by the university's own auditors, we saw things were not right."

At the May 20 meeting of the 120-member state board of missions, University of Mobile President Michael Magnoli denounced the recommendation, saying it amounts to a "misuse" of the management letter and a pattern of "harassment" that had continued through the past nine months.

"The University of Mobile's books are clean," said Magnoli. "Let's go back to what we agreed on last year. We're staying right on track."

Magnoli also produced a fax from the audit manager of Wilkins Miller saying, "Nothing has come to our attention during the preliminary planning of the university's audit to cause us to believe the university does not follow generally accepted accounting principles." The faxed letter says it is a common practice to omit disclosures in such financial statements.

Magnoli said "nothing positive" would come of the subcommittee's recommendation, which he called a "subversive attempt" to cut off the university's accreditation. He also said state convention leadership was holding the University of Mobile to a double standard while Samford University was not subject to the same kind of scrutiny. In September 1994, Samford's board of trustees voted to elect their successors without convention approval, an action currently being studied by a state convention committee.

But James Moebes, pastor of Mountain Brook Baptist Church in the Birmingham association and chairman of the convention's education commission, read a letter at the meeting enumerating the concerns of the commission. His letter, addressed to Roy Bedwell, chairman of the finance committee of the University of Mobile's board of trustees, states the questions of internal control systems may cause the university "serious negative impact" with the university's accrediting agency and also with the U.S. Department of Education.

"Because the Education Commission has no interest whatsoever in micro-managing any of our three institutions of higher education, and since your Board of Trustees is ultimately accountable and in every way responsible for the University of Mobile, I am simply calling these matters to your attention so that your board may address each of these concerns in an appropriate manner," Moebes wrote.

Rick Cagle, pastor of First Baptist Church, Gadsden, and chairman of the University of Mobile's trustees, said the recommendation was "pure politics" and neither the state convention office nor the subcommittee had "adequately" communicated with the university.

Cagle said the statements in the management letter were taken out of context and were never discussed with university officials.

"If you were honestly pursuing these questions, wouldn't you pick up the phone and call us?" Cagle said. "We (as a board of trustees) did not want to send the management letter in the first place based on our past experience. Again, it was severely misrepresented and taken out of context. This is so unprofessional and so unchristian for people who are supposed to be working together in a cooperative relationship. The University of Mobile is not treated like a welcome member of the Alabama Baptist family."

Cagle said the university would send a complete audit at the end of its fiscal year, which ends July 31, but the subcommittee "keeps adding new interpretations of what the convention agreement means."

"At this point, we are totally frustrated by the way in which the ad hoc committee has added jots and tittles to the agreement. We don't know what they want or how to satisfy them, and we can't satisfy their demands until the end of our fiscal year in July."

Cagle said he will ask convention president Fred Lackey to reconvene a committee of past presidents and state board of missions chairmen, which hammered out the compromise agreement passed last year. Until then, Cagle said the state convention's integrity has been damaged.

"This was not about reason," he said. "This was politics pure and simple in an effort to embarrass the University of Mobile. The vote was very divisive, with moderates versus conservatives voting along partisan lines.

"There are people on the executive committee and on the ad hoc committee who are trying to refight the convention's struggle. From the time we declared we were going to be a conservative institution, we have had nothing but trouble," Cagle said. "Our current leadership seems intent on dividing this convention. For the first time, I'm hearing talk of forming a second state convention or of churches beginning to seriously reconsider bypassing Montgomery in their giving.

"Everyone thought it was settled, and around the first of the year it started back up again. In my church, if there was such divisiveness, I would never lead the church to vote. I would stop and pray and get together on the same page."

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Southern Baptists, Assemblies
top congregational giving study By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
5/25/95

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A national congregational giving study shows two conservative denominations, Southern Baptists and Assemblies of God, with the highest per capita giving -- and pledging as a common factor.

The American Congregational Giving Study had five church bodies as participants in what officials said covered the "whole spectrum of Christian denominations in this country, the breadth of the study far exceeds any ever attempted." It was commissioned by the Lilly Endowment, Inc., and surveyed 625 congregations, 125 in each of five major church bodies in the United States.

Participating in the 1993 study: Assemblies of God, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Roman Catholic Church and Southern Baptist Convention.

Although the findings are still being studied, officials made some preliminary findings. Among them:

-- More evangelical or denominationally conservative beliefs are definitely associated with higher levels of giving.

-- It is important whether church members have planned how much they will contribute over the year. People dedicated to a tithe give the most, followed by those who decide on an annual percentage of income to be donated. Those who decide how much to give on the spot each Sunday give the least.

-- Opinions about the national or international denomination have little influence on the amount given.

-- Stewardship programs generally have an effect, but the amount is mixed.

In the study the 125 congregations sampled were from the nine census regions of the country. Trained field workers visited the churches, filled out Congregation Profile Booklets together with the pastor or finance officer and gathered a random sample of 30 names for the lay questionnaires. The result was church profile booklets from 625 congregations and nearly 11,000 members.

Overall enthusiasm for the congregation's work and programs was highest among laypeople in Assemblies and Southern Baptist churches. The study also noted Assemblies and Southern Baptists "usually teach that tithing is obligatory and that God expects it. Catholics, Lutherans and Presbyterians tend to teach that tithing is optional."

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One of the questions asked respondents was, "What is your congregation's emphasis with regard to the biblical standard of tithing (at least 10 percent of income)?" One answer choice, "The tithe belongs to God and is due God. In addition Christians should give offerings as they are able," was checked by 81 of Southern Baptists' responding while 99 percent of the Assemblies of God agreed, but only 2 percent of the Lutherans and 5 percent of Catholics agreed.

Researchers also made some tentative conclusions, including:

- Level of family income clearly influences the level of giving to the congregation. But as income increases, the Assemblies and Baptist members increase their giving faster than the others.
 - Giving varies by age, with the highest giving by people 45 to 65 years old.
 - Those who give the most are currently married and whose spouses attend the same congregation.
 - In general, the more orthodox the members' belief and faith, the higher the giving.
 - People who decide about giving for an entire year give much more than those who decide on the spot each week.
 - Stewardship programs seem to have a modest effect on giving.
- In a summary, the study also said:
- Church size is not an important factor in giving.
 - Feelings of alienation from denominational leadership or from denominational moral teachings are not important.
 - Theological differences are important. Evangelical beliefs are associated with higher giving.
 - Differences in giving are traceable largely to high-education, high-income parishioners. In conservative Protestant churches, these people give large amounts.

Representatives of the five church bodies met May 11-12 in Indianapolis to discuss the study, according to Ronald E. Chandler, who as president of the Stewardship Commission represented Southern Baptists. The study was conducted by a team led by Dean Hoge, professor of sociology, The Catholic University of America, Washington.

"This study helps us to understand if some of our conventional wisdom is myth or truth," Chandler said. "Insights gathered from such an effort help us to improve our efforts to lead Southern Baptists to more effective ways of teaching biblical stewardship."

Full results of the study will be published in a book due in early 1996.

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**Alabama citizens mobilize
to stop gambling spread**

By Bill Merrell

**Baptist Press
5/25/95**

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (BP)--"Our purpose is to assure that Alabama citizens, not organized crime, hold the future of our state." That opening volley by emcee Mickey A. Kirkland, pastor of Lighthouse Baptist Church, Montgomery, Ala., set the tone of an anti-gambling rally in a plaza fronting the Alabama's State House.

Aware of the bad experience other states have had with the onset of legalized gambling, more than 400 citizens from every part of Alabama gathered May 9 to register opposition to a bill to authorize a statewide election in which pro-gambling forces hope voters will approve a change in the state constitution to legalize casino and lottery gambling.

Alabama is the latest in a lengthening list of states in which legalizing various forms of gambling has been urged as a means of relieving revenue pressures.

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Jo Bob Mizzell, director of Christian life and public affairs for the Alabama Baptist Conv ntion, stated, "The gambling industry is pushing the legislature to allow a vote by the people on this. The people of Alabama should not have to pay for a statewide vote that would benefit no one except the casino owners and operators."

Rally attendees heard political and religious leaders denounce the pro-gambling effort as fatally flawed. Gov. Fob James said, "Casino gambling morally, socially and economically is a failure."

James stated, "Some will try to confuse the issues and they will say the people deserve the right to vote. There's no bigger booster for initiative and referendum in this state or this country than your governor." But, as he held up a copy of the bill before the crowd, the governor said, "This 325 pages of deceit, chicanery and 24 stacked decks has nothing to do with initiative and referendum."

He further charged gambling advocates with fashioning a campaign to mislead Alabama voters, insulting them in the process. "I'm amazed that Alabamians would dare try to insult the intelligence of 4 million other Alabamians with that kind of garbage. But be not misled: In one regard, millions of dollars are aligned against the people of Alabama. The finest public relations gurus of the world will be brought in, pressure will come to bear on legislators. They will promise the world."

Calling for citizen action, the governor said, "words are cheap; the action must be taken after you leave here. You must change the minds of those legislators and senators that have been misled."

Attorney General Jeff Sessions declared his opposition to the gambling bill as chief law enforcement officer in Alabama, saying, "I do not believe that gambling in any form is good for Alabama." Referring to the proposed bill, he said, "This has a lot of words in it. Some of these words will make some people rich, while other of its words will make many people poor." In a comparable vein, Sheriff James Jones of Shelby County stated, "The sheriffs of Alabama have come out in opposition to casino gambling because we know what it's going to mean to law enforcement."

Eighteen state senators and representatives from both political parties, joined by Stephanie Bell of the state board of education, also were present to state their opposition to casino gambling and urge those assembled to be involved in the decision process. Sen. Albert Lipscomb observed, "This is a defining moment for the state of Alabama. We are going to see now whether elected officials are going to permit the agenda to be set by our citizens or by special interest groups."

Mizzell summed up the position of the citizen Christians of Alabama saying, "The attempt to bring high-stakes gambling to Alabama should be killed by the legislature. As you become involved in this issue, be aware God has called you to be 'salt and light' to this world."

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Ferguson delivers address
to Midwestern's 80 grads

Baptist Press
5/25/95

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--"Everyone loves a story," began Milton Ferguson as he delivered the 35th commencement address at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary May 20.

Ferguson, president of the seminary since 1973, told the institution's 80 graduates that when his daughter, Julia, was a little girl, she loved to hear him tell stories that began with, "Once upon a time." He said she especially enjoyed a story when he tailored it to her, starting with, "Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Julia."

He said sometimes when he was reading a book to Julia, she would push it aside and say, "Daddy, do 'Once upon a time,' and put me in it."

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Ferguson related, "You know, the Bible is a story. It is a story of what God has done, of what God is doing and of what God will do.

"There comes a time in your life," he told the audience, "when you recognize the greatest story of all and you say to God: Do 'once upon a time.' Tell me your story, and put me in it."

So, each Christian adds his or her own story to "that ongoing throng (of believers) and becomes a part of God's purpose, ministry and mission," Ferguson noted.

"I challenge you today, as you look toward the future with a mixture of hope, determination and enthusiasm, and with a measure of fear, anxiety and uncertainty -- gather strength from God's 'once upon a time,'" Ferguson said. "Reach back into the living history of God's people and receive that whole wondrous heritage of God's redemptive, saving activity in human history and recognize that God has chosen to place you at the very heart of his 'once upon a time.' You are essential, desired and chosen to be part of his story."

Apparently referring to the anticipated June vote of Midwestern trustees to elect a new president for the seminary upon his retirement, Ferguson, 67, added, "I challenge you to join me in looking toward a different kind of future than that to which we've been accustomed in the past few years and in anticipating the continuing unfolding of God's 'once upon a time' in our lives. I challenge you to go out and seek a measure of courage and strength and the ability to stay put, to stay with the race that God has laid out for us to run."

Ferguson told graduates it has been 43 years since he first enrolled as a divinity student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. He spent six years as a student there, he said, then 17 years as a SWBTS professor, and the past 22 years as president of Midwestern.

"There's nothing like the privilege of sharing in the shaping of men and women into the likeness and stature of Christ as they commit themselves to ministry," he reflected.

"The focus on 'story' is not simply an anecdotal gimmick," he concluded. "It really comes to the very heart of the matter for you and me, as we acknowledge and embrace the gift of God's heritage to us and as we respond to his call to take our place in that ongoing gospel story being written in the lives and hearts of men and women, boys and girls around the world."

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Texas town's youth respond
to Sunday night rallies

By Chuck Lutke

Baptist Press
5/25/95

ROUND ROCK, Texas (BP)--The success of an experiment in monthly Sunday evening citywide youth rallies on the campus of Texas Baptist Children's Home, Round Rock, Texas, for church-fleeing high schoolers has prompted organizers to renew the outreach this fall.

Two youth ministers, Allen Frans of Central Baptist and Chris Pollard of First Baptist, met with TBCH chaplain, Keith Dyer, last November to exchange ideas and suggestions for a prototype youth rally featuring high-energy music, slick video and live dramatic presentations, peer testimonies and a relevant, issues-oriented message of faith.

The initial rally, "Solid Rock '95," was presented last January in the gymnasium of Texas Baptist Children's Home and the effort struck a responsive chord with teens, many of whom had lost interest in traditional Sunday evening worship services at local Baptist, Methodist and Lutheran churches.

Attendance grew steadily from a respectable 100 in January to well over 350 by the final rally in mid-May.

Speakers and musical talent for the rallies were selected from a cadre of area youth ministers and teachers.

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Messag topics were not by committee design but were left entirely to the discretion of each speaker.

Dyer attributed the success of the rallies to cooperation and leadership among the ranks of the young people themselves. "So many of the juniors and seniors in this group have been influential in reaching their friends inside and outside of our churches," said Dyer. "It's been great to see athletes and scholarship leaders getting involved and making this event the place to be on Sunday nights."

While the overall impact of the six rallies on so many individual young lives is impossible to measure, some 55 public faith decisions were recorded by counselors.

Dyer says planning sessions are already under way for the next Solid Rock '95 which will take place at TBCH in late August, shortly after the beginning of the new school year.

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EDITORS' NOTE: In (BP) story titled "Kenya gunmen shoot, rob Baptist missionaries," dated 5/19/95, please replace the fourth paragraph with the following paragraph:

Mrs. Scales initially was placed in a "high dependency unit" in Nairobi Hospital but was moved to a private room two days following the shooting and was making "slow but steady progress." There was no indication of infection. She had begun moving her wounded left leg and physical therapy was to begin May 25. She is expected to be hospitalized six to eight weeks before the bone graft is attempted.

Thanks,
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