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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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June 5, 1995

KENTUCKY--Ethnic leaders meet with PSSC's Brister, Mohler.  
DALLAS--Texas GLC, Maston Foundation produce AIDS ministry helps.  
CALIFORNIA--California church blossoms from challenge to pastor; photo.  
TENNESSEE--Sunday School Board to offer Calvin and Hobbs' commentaries.

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Ethnic leaders meet with  
PSSC's Brister, Mohler

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press  
6/5/95

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--About 35 language and ethnic leaders outlined concerns about the proposed reorganization of the Southern Baptist Convention during an informal meeting with two members of the SBC Program and Structure Study Committee June 2.

Afterward, the Home Mission Board official who convened the meeting said he was "very encouraged."

However, the two representatives of the restructuring committee -- Mark Brister and Al Mohler -- apparently were not able to make any specific pledges in answer to the ethnic leaders' concerns. The restructuring proposal is now out of the committee's hands, and its fate and implementation lie with the Southern Baptist Convention and its Executive Committee.

Russell Begaye, director of language church extension with the HMB, convened the meeting in conjunction with Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. No press representatives were invited to observe the meeting, but Mohler, Begaye and two other language missions leaders agreed to an interview afterward.

Begaye said the 35 language and ethnic leaders came from across the United States and represented a wide range of responsibilities and ethnic groups. The session included a two-hour dialogue followed by a luncheon.

"The key word we were looking for was 'intentionality,'" Begaye explained. "Ethnics must be intentionally involved in the denomination."

Ethnics must no longer be "stepchildren" in the SBC, he said. "We want to be a part of the new structure."

Thus, Begaye said the language and ethnic leaders outlined four primary concerns about the restructuring proposal:

-- a desire for the SBC's language and ethnic work to retain a national strategy rather than opening the door to many regional strategies.

As written, the restructuring proposal calls for most old-line southern states to assume total control of home missions work within their borders. Language missions leaders said they fear this will lead to neglect of language and ethnic work in key states due to a lack of resources and strategy.

Mohler said this should not be a threat to language and ethnic strategy, since the new North American Mission Board still will carry a mandate for developing national strategies. However, he did not suggest any means by which the North American Mission Board will hold sway over large state conventions that may no longer receive funding from the mission board.

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Also, the idea of making the old-line states more self-sufficient was not the committee's, he said, but is merely a re-emphasis of a goal previously adopted by the SBC.

-- that the new Great Commission Council -- intended to be a coordinating group between the International Mission Board and North American Mission Board -- must include some ethnic leadership.

As suggested in the committee's proposal, this council will be comprised of 14 people, by virtue of holding administrative or trustee positions with the two mission boards. Few, if any, of those positions currently are held by ethnics, noted Daniel Moon, an HMB consultant on Korean ministries.

The language missions leaders suggested a change should be made in the criteria for who sits on the Great Commission Council to ensure ethnics will have a place at the table.

Mohler called this a "keen suggestion" which he will be "pleased to forward" to those responsible for implementing the reorganization. However, no change will be recommended by the committee before the report is presented to the SBC annual meeting for a vote, he indicated.

-- how the global ministries of Southern Baptist ethnics will be included in the reorganization.

The current SBC structure does not take full advantage of all Southern Baptist ethnics have to offer, the leaders said.

Ethnic leaders have promoted several ideas that have not been embraced in the current SBC structure, but which ethnic leaders would like to see included in the new structure.

For example, the Foreign Mission Board currently won't appoint an ethnic person to serve as a missionary in his or her home country, Begaye said. Ethnic leaders think it would make good sense to send ethnic missionaries to countries where they already know the culture and language.

Another issue is "how ethnic fellowships can partner with the SBC to send missionaries into countries where they have affinity groups," Begaye said. A number of ethnic fellowships have developed within the SBC in recent decades. These fellowships are akin to associations based on cultural identities rather than geographic identities.

Mohler and Brister apparently offered no concrete answer to this question, saying the end results will be determined by those who manage the new SBC structures.

-- the "silence" of the reorganization committee on ethnics and language missions.

While the report makes occasional references to "all people groups," it does not explicitly address the presence of the SBC's large number of ethnic and language groups. Language missions leaders have wondered why their influence was not mentioned and why no specific statements were made to highlight the importance of language missions.

Mohler said the committee did not intend to send any negative signals. "It is unfair to criticize the report for its silence on any number of issues," he said.

During the interview session after the meeting, Mohler spoke effusively about the importance of language missions work and of giving language and ethnic church members opportunities for national leadership.

"Hearing the statements Dr. Mohler has made -- even in this interview -- is very encouraging," Begaye said. "I sense a willingness to bring ethnics into the structure of Southern Baptist life."

Begaye said it "took a lot of guts" for Mohler and Brister to meet with ethnic and language leadership.

Southern Baptist ethnics have criticized the makeup of the seven-member Program and Structure Study Committee, which included no ethnics, no blacks and no women.

In the post-meeting interview, Mohler was asked if the positive dialogue session led him to believe ethnic representation should have been included on the restructuring committee.

He paused for a long period of thought and then said: "I believe God called together seven men who were able to work together in remarkable harmony and consensus. I am thankful for our committee. ... However, we didn't name ourselves."

Now that the reorganization plan has been laid, in the next phase of implementation, "without question ethnic leadership must be central partners," he added.

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Texas CLC, Maston Foundation  
produce AIDS ministry helps

By Ken Camp

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DALLAS (BP)--The Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission and the T.B. Maston Foundation have produced a videotape-based curriculum to help churches begin ministries to people with AIDS.

"Echoes From the Valley: Beginning an AIDS Ministry" is an hour-long videotape divided into three 20-minute sections.

It begins with an edited version of a 1993 speech by Jimmy Allen to the T.B. Maston Foundation, a nonprofit organization devoted to promoting the study and application of Christian ethics. Allen, a former Southern Baptist Convention president and denominational executive, told how AIDS touched the lives of his family.

The tape's second section features an interview with Janet Squires, a pediatrician at Children's Medical Center, Dallas, who specializes in AIDS and HIV.

The last segment is a panel discussion involving Travis Berry, retired pastor and AIDS ministry consultant with Baylor University Medical Center, Dallas; Karen Gilbert, community minister at Broadway Baptist Church, Fort Worth; and Larry James, former pastor of East Richardson Church of Christ, currently director of a community services center in Dallas.

A viewers' guide for the video is included in the 24-page resource booklet, "AIDS: Facing Facts, Confronting Fears, Ministering to People." The guide provides suggestions on scheduling three one-hour sessions based on the tape's three sections, and it provides discussion questions and suggestions for facilitators.

The booklet also includes a sample infectious disease policy from First Baptist Church, Arlington; medical information on HIV; a biblical perspective on the AIDS crisis; suggested steps toward a ministry to people who are HIV-positive; a recommended format for AIDS education in a church setting; and a caregiver's guide for working with homebound AIDS patients.

The curriculum updates and replaces the original AIDS ministry packet developed in 1988 by the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, the public policy and moral concerns office of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Information about order the videotape and accompanying resource booklet can be obtained from the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, 333 N. Washington, Dallas TX 75246-1798.

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California church blossoms  
from challenge to pastor

By Linda Lawson

FREMONT, Calif. (BP)--Starting a new church was the furthest thing from Ray Jones' mind in 1987 when, at age 25, he was presented that challenge.

Eight years later, Fremont Bible Fellowship -- a growing congregation of 1,200 members with an enlarging vision for the future -- stands as a tribute to the reality that God uses people to point others in the direction of his will for their lives.

Elgia Wells, now manager of the black church development section at the Baptist Sunday School Board, was Jones' reflection group leader at Emmanuel Baptist Church in San Jose, Calif., when he posed the question to Jones about starting a new church.

"At first I laughed," Jones recalled during a Sunday morning interview in his study between worship services. "I didn't know anything about church starts. The Lord really led us."

After he and his wife, Florence, became convinced God was indeed leading them to start a new church, two existing congregations, Pilgrims Rest in Oakland and Emmanuel of San Jose, agreed to serve as sponsors. The next question became, "Where?"

Jones found the answer not on a California map, but in the Bible, Acts 16:6-10, where the Apostle Paul had a vision in which he saw a Macedonian saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

"The Lord just said no, not San Jose," Jones said. "He laid on our hearts Fremont," a town about 20 miles up Interstate 880. "There was only one predominantly black church in Fremont and the community was growing."

Since enrolling 34 charter members on Nov. 9, 1987, the church has met in seven locations. They bought their present building, located on one acre of land in an industrial park, in November 1991 and moved in 1992.

The story of obtaining rezoning to allow a church to meet in the industrial park without adequate on-site parking was another miracle, Jones said.

"By law, we would have had to have a minimum of five acres for parking. God moved and the city changed the codes," he said.

Since the businesses around the church are not open on Sunday, members park on the street, making creative use of a circular turn-around.

Out of a concern that the church was failing to reach for active involvement persons making spiritual decisions in the worship services, Jones changed the criteria for membership. Instead of automatically becoming church members when they made a profession of faith or requested church membership, he instituted an eight-week new member training class. People become members only when they complete all eight sessions.

The result has been "qualitative growth rather than quantitative growth," Jones said.

Also, through a "Shepherd's Ministry" similar to the deacon family ministry plan, people who make public decisions are visited weekly at first and then regularly but on a less frequent basis.

"Each person attends a church because someone brought them. If they can develop one or two relationships at the church, they tend to stay. We want to intensify our efforts to reach people in the first month," Jones said.

FBF has approximately 1,200 members, adding about 10 per month. In addition to a strong focus on Sunday school, the church carries out about 25 ministries, including Woman's Missionary Union, men's and women's Bible study and sharing ministries, Friday night family activities, Lay Institute for Equipping discipleship courses and others.

"The target of our evangelism is to go to all apartment complexes," said minister of education Edwin Holton. "We're trying to reach the lost."

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After initial contact in a complex, "we want to go back and start a ministry -- Bible study, children's activity or something else to meet needs. We believe we are the body of Christ and must reach out to the community."

The church is ahead of schedule for what had been envisioned in its eighth year. Ethnic makeup is the only area that differs from the original vision.

"We had envisioned more ethnic diversity," Jones said of the predominantly black congregation. "I had hoped to see more."

Asked to identify where the church should be in the year 2000, Jones turns, not to general desires, but to specific plans:

- own and worship in a building of 72,000 square feet;
- 1,000 attending Sunday school;
- worship attendance of 2,500-3,000;
- 400 baptisms per year;
- youth center;
- gymnasium;
- school of ministry;
- preschool ministry;
- planning beginning for a seniors complex; and
- efforts beginning to buy 20-40 acres for a new facility.

Jones describes his leadership style as that of a "professional manager. I give people responsibility." Using terms introduced by Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church, Mission Viejo, Calif., Jones said as the church has grown he has moved from being a "shepherd" with a lot of hands-on responsibility to a "rancher" with a wider range of duties who delegates more.

With his younger adult baby boomer congregation, with the predominant age group being 30-45, Jones says effective communication of the gospel must include two dimensions -- simplicity and application to everyday life needs.

Many who are being attracted to Fremont Bible Fellowship grew up in homes where their parents had quit going to church or who moved a lot and seldom attended.

"They're coming because they remember what they were told about the church by their grandparents or parents. When we make the gospel plain, simple and real, they respond," Jones said.

The need for simplicity doesn't deter Jones from sometimes dealing with less familiar Bible passages. On an April Sunday, his text was from the Old Testament Book of Judges and focused on Abimelech. He took 15 minutes to give the background of his focal passage in an easy-to-understand dramatic narrative. Paper for taking notes was distributed with the bulletin. In a preaching-teaching style, Jones listed his main points clearly, spelling and defining Hebrew words and often instructing the congregation to repeat key points to the persons sitting beside them.

Larry Fisher, director of missions for the East Bay Baptist Association, described FBF as a "contemporary black congregation. One of their strengths is the high percentage of people who participate in the total ministries. The church has continued to expand its vision."

Jones foresees adding a third worship service to reach more people. Three services could accommodate 1,500-1,800 persons, "but we can't park that many," he noted.

Holton echoed Jones' desire for growth but in another area.

"We have a lot of ministries, but most are for ourselves. We're embarking on programs for social ministries," he said. "If we're going to reach the lost for Christ we have to go where they are."

Seeing limitations as obstacles to be overcome has become a way of life for FBF leaders and members. They expect and depend on the Lord to find a way over, under or through them.

"The Lord really has given us favor in the city of Fremont," Jones said.

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

Sunday School Board to offer  
Calvin and Hobbs' commentaries By Chip Alford

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Beginning in October, the Baptist Sunday School Board will offer "Calvin and Hobbs."

No, the Southern Baptist publishing house isn't getting into the comic strip business; it's just making available adult Sunday school commentaries by Calvin Miller and Herschel Hobbs.

Miller, a best-selling Southern Baptist author, speaker and seminary professor, will be featured in a new audio commentary on adult Life and Work Sunday school lessons. Released quarterly, "Sound Truths: Life and Work Bible Studies on Tape" will consist of original comments, insights and applications written and recorded by Miller. Each session will be 10-12 minutes in length.

Miller currently is professor of communications and ministry studies and writer-in-residence at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. A former pastor, he is the author of 30 books, including "The Singer," "The Song" and "The Empowered Communicator."

"We wanted to offer a product that provides the convenience of an audiocassette and substantive commentary on Sunday school lessons," Rick Edwards, manager of the BSSB's adult biblical studies section, said. "We think Miller's creative talent will capture people's attention and enhance their understanding of each week's biblical passage and central Bible truth.

"It's also an excellent resource for people who are visually impaired," Edwards said.

The new product replaces "Life and Work Pursuits: Cassette Tape Edition," an audio version of Sunday school lessons designed for adults 35-54. "Sound Truths" relates to lessons for all three adult Life and Work age groupings -- younger adults (18-34), middle adults (35-54) and older adults (55 and up).

October marks the beginning of the 28th year of Hobbs' commentary, "Studying Adult Life and Work Lessons." One of the BSSB's most popular products -- it generates sales revenue of almost \$1.5 million annually -- the quarterly publication is being renamed "The Herschel Hobbs Commentary" with the previous moniker as a subtitle.

"Most people refer to it as the Hobbs' commentary anyway," Ross McLaren, a biblical studies designer at the BSSB, said. "He's had such an impact on Southern Baptist Bible study, we felt it was time to name the product in his honor."

The commentary currently follows the outline in "Ventures" and "Pathways," Life and Work Sunday school quarterlies for older adults. But beginning in January, McLaren said the commentary also will feature outlines, purpose statements and central Bible truths from Life and Work quarterlies for middle adults ("Pursuits") and younger adults ("Directions").

"Sound Truths" and "The Herschel Hobbs Commentary" may be ordered on the dated literature order form, through Baptist Book Stores and Lifeway Christian Stores, or by calling the BSSB Customer Service Center, toll-free, at 1-800-458-2772.

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