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Resolutions Committee
frames racism statement

By Keith Hinson

Baptist Press
6/19/95

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention Resolutions Committee will unanimously recommend a "Resolution on Racial Reconciliation" to messengers at the June 20-22 annual meeting of the SBC in Atlanta.

The SBC should denounce "racism in all its forms," according to the proposed resolution drafted by the Resolutions Committee, which met at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Atlanta, June 17.

Though most resolutions will not be presented until Wednesday, June 21, the racial reconciliation resolution likely will be scheduled for consideration at approximately 4:25 p.m. Tuesday, June 20 -- prior to Tuesday evening's program, which will include an observance of the 150th anniversary of the SBC's founding.

Several invited guests participated with Resolutions Committee members in the discussion, including Gary Frost, an African American pastor and SBC second vice president.

"I appreciate this more than I can ever convey. Your sincerity is communicated," Frost told the committee, which spent more than four hours discussing the resolution's wording.

The proposed resolution offers an apology to African Americans and repentance from the sin of racism. "Be it ... resolved that we apologize to all African-Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our lifetime," the resolution says, "and we genuinely repent of racism of which we have been guilty, whether consciously or unconsciously. Be it further resolved that we ask forgiveness from our African-American brothers and sisters."

"I can't think of a better way to go into the celebration of the many wonderful things in our past and to do so with a clear conscience," said Richard Land, president of the SBC's Christian Life Commission.

Land noted that the CLC proposed such a resolution to coincide with the sesquicentennial celebration of the SBC, which was founded in 1845 after breaking with northern Baptists in part over the issue of whether slave holders could be appointed as missionaries.

Noting slavery had never been dealt with by any resolution since the founding of the SBC, the committee's resolution says: "We lament and repudiate historic acts of evil such as slavery from which we continue to reap a bitter harvest." The statement also said American slavery was "particularly inhumane."

One participant in the discussion asked if slavery in America was really worse than slavery elsewhere. Other participants replied affirmatively, saying American slaves were often treated as animals, families were separated and black women were often raped by white slave owners.

The committee's deliberations were conducted under "background rules" for the press, which means that comments during the meeting may be reported but not attributed by name to the person.

In formulating the resolution, the committee worked primarily from a statement developed by a "Racial Reconciliation Consultation," which brought together 14 Baptist leaders -- some black and some white -- for a May 22 meeting in Nashville.

At times, the committee also drew from an alternate proposal by Daniel R. Heimbach, associate professor of Christian ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.

But the final form of the resolution was more similar in structure and length to the statement from the Nashville consultation, which was sponsored by the CLC.

Frost, who attended the May 18 consultation, stressed the importance of the resolution for race relations in the SBC and the United States. "I believe it will have a great impact upon our convention and upon our nation," he said.

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The students were to have traveled June 12 to Cuba to spend eight weeks working in churches in the Baptist Convention of Western Cuba.

The Cuban government issued them visas, but they haven't yet received a U.S. Treasury Department license granting them permission to travel to the communist nation.

"I think we'r dealing with strained relationships between governments," said Mark Smith, a Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board area missionary to the Caribbean. "I'm concerned that our efforts to help spread the gospel in Cuba are being caught in the middle of the process of politics."

Smith said the license application was filed well over a month ago, as soon as final student and project information became available. But when the licenses hadn't come through by June 9, he and other project coordinators decided to send the students temporarily to the Dominican Republic.

The six students -- all Spanish speakers -- arrived June 12 in Santo Domingo, the Dominican capital, where they are doing door-to-door evangelism and survey work through local Baptists.

"They'll give the local Baptist churches a boost by trying to find (church membership) prospects and by reaching people for Christ," said Smith, who is based in Davie, Fla.

The license delay has come partly because two Treasury Department officials processing Cuba requests are overwhelmed by the number of applications, Smith said. In addition, license requests for humanitarian projects are being given higher priority than religious requests.

It's the third such delay Smith has experienced since the U.S. government last August began requiring the license of U.S. citizens traveling to Cuba. Smith and several other Foreign Mission Board officials had to cancel a trip to Cuba in early May because licenses did not come through in time. Also, an earlier trip in December was delayed for the same reason. In all cases visas from the Cuban government were granted, Smith said.

"It's not a problem on the Cuba end," he said. "The Cuban government is cooperating."

Smith urged Southern Baptists to pray that the students' licenses would be granted in time for them to get into Cuba this summer. "We're hoping that we'll have the approval from the U.S. Treasury Department in a couple of weeks," he said. "We're still holding onto that as a possibility, looking at (the students') transfer into Cuba maybe around June 26."

If the licenses come through, the students will conduct Vacation Bible Schools, work with youth and help lead services in some of the western Baptist convention's smaller, rural churches. "These churches are ones that haven't received much help from outsiders," said Smith. "They're some of the newest (Baptist) congregations in Cuba."

Last year the convention organized nine new churches, bringing its total churches to 127. Those churches baptized 1,947 new believers, up from the convention's 1993 baptism total of 1,228.

The students working with those churches would be the third consecutive group of Texas Baptist Student Union summer missionaries to serve in Cuba during recent years. Texas students who went in 1993 were the first to serve there as summer missionaries since the early 1960s.

The Texas team includes Laura Arthur, of Dawson; Argelio Bolanos, Arlington; Ada Loera Cordero, from Juarez, Mexico, and a student at South Plains College, Levelland; Gregory Cuellar, Kingsville; Susana Macias, Glen Rose; and Kalaya Minatra, Seguin.

If SBC messengers approve the resolution, Frost -- as a representative of the African American community -- will speak to the convention and accept the apology offered in the resolution. Frost is pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church, Youngstown, Ohio.

Charles T. Carter, Resolutions Committee chairman and pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala., praised Frost's involvement in the process of drawing up the resolution. He called Frost's election last year as an SBC officer "providential."

Last year, messengers to the annual meetings of several state conventions approved similar resolutions of racial repentance and reconciliation.

The committee unanimously approved two other resolutions to be recommended to the SBC with the following titles:

-- "On Religious Liberty and World Evangelization," which expresses support for religious liberty and freedom of conscience around the world and asks Baptists to pray about the matter.

The resolution calls on other nations to honor human rights provisions in such documents as the United Nations charter and the Helsinki accord on human rights. It also asks the CLC, the Foreign Mission Board, the Baptist World Alliance and the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department to investigate and report on infringement of religious liberty by governments and religious groups.

-- "On the Patenting of Animal and Human Genes." The resolution calls for a moratorium on the patenting of "animal and human tissues and genetic sequences" by the U.S. Patent Office.

According to Land, the genes of humans and animals are "pre-owned material. We shouldn't patent material that was created by God." Land said one "bio-tech company" has patented a gene that is related to breast cancer so that anyone who does research on the gene must pay a royalty to do so.

In other action, the committee declined to take action on a resolution critical of state conventions that channel money to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Committee members noted last year's action by the SBC, which asked denominational agencies and entities to stop accepting money from the CBF. One participant in the discussion suggested that nothing has happened since that time to indicate the need for further action by the SBC related to the CBF.

The committee delayed until Tuesday discussion on:

-- a resolution relating to recognition of "unknown servants" who work in SBC ministries often with little recognition or thought of compensation.

-- a resolution urging "Southern Baptist leaders and agencies to refrain from publicly endorsing or denouncing any political candidate or potential appointee in the name of our convention or any agency of our convention."

-- a resolution opposing the appointment of Dr. Henry Foster as surgeon general of the United States and calling for a filibuster by the U.S. Senate to thwart the nomination.

O.S. Hawkins, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, had submitted to the committee a "Resolution on Jewish Evangelism" that was proposed by a Southern Baptist worker in Israel.

But committee members decided to refer the resolution to the FMB if it is introduced by a messenger during the convention meeting. According to committee sources, similar resolutions have been presented twice in recent years and were referred to the FMB and HMB.

Committee members said they did not want to single out Jewish people as especially in need of missions efforts and evangelization but stressed the need to preach the Christian message to all peoples of the world.

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WMU board, execs affirm
O'Brien's PSSC concerns

By Teresa Dickens

Baptist Press
6/19/95

ATLANTA (BP)--Members of Woman's Missionary Union's executive board and state WMU executive directors have affirmed statements by WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien that the plan to restructure the Southern Baptist Convention by the Program and Structure Study Committee, if implemented, would significantly change WMU's relationship with the SBC.

Meeting in a joint session June 17, the two bodies of WMU leaders chose to support O'Brien's response to the PSSC's report rather than draft an official statement so close to the SBC vote on the proposed restructuring of the convention.

The report of the PSSC will be presented at 10 a.m. June 20, opening day of the 150th anniversary meeting of the SBC in Atlanta. Action on the report may be taken during that same business session or later that day.

Although WMU would maintain its auxiliary status to the SBC under the proposed restructure, its traditional assignments would be given to SBC agencies. The committee gave the responsibility for promoting the home and foreign mission offerings to the respective missions boards and has assigned missions education to the proposed North American Mission Board and the development of women's ministries to the Baptist Sunday School Board.

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Committee members have said the reason WMU was not given any assignments in its report is because its board is not appointed by the SBC and therefore, the organization has no accountability to the SBC.

O'Brien has countered, "In reality, our faithful, unselfish service for more than a hundred years should demonstrate our 'accountability.'"

Mark Brister, PSSC chairman and a Louisiana pastor; Jerry Rankin, president of the Foreign Mission Board; and other SBC leaders have insisted that adoption of the report would not change the relationship WMU has with the SBC. They contend that as an auxiliary of the SBC, WMU could continue to function in SBC life as it has in the past.

O'Brien stated these promises are good but not enough.

"We accept with gratitude Dr. Brister's statements and those of others that WMU's historical relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention will continue. However, our concern is for the future. While the verbal commitments are good, only the report will endure. The commentaries will be forgotten in time. Southern Baptists will approve or disapprove the report, not the promises and verbal comments made concerning it."

Inclusion in the report is the only way WMU could feel confident about its future role in the SBC, O'Brien has said. Thus her request in April that the committee amend its report to include WMU's ministry statement. The PSSC declined.

"As for WMU, we are moving 'full speed ahead,'" O'Brien has pledged.

"WMU has never feared change. We have been involved in massive changes ourselves in recent years. Structures and formats may change, but the need for an organization that will sensitize Christians to the need of the world for Christ and that will provide them with models and opportunities for praying, going and giving to share the good news will endure. We intend to continue to be that kind of organization for Southern Baptists."

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**WMU executive board approves
budget, sets 1998 NAC dates**

**Baptist Press
6/19/95**

ATLANTA, June 19--Woman's Missionary Union executive board approved the 1995-96 operational budget for WMU, SBC, and selected Louisville, Ky., as the next site for a National Acteens Convention during its semiannual meeting June 17 in Atlanta.

The board met prior to the opening of the 1995 WMU annual meeting, June 18-19 at the Georgia World Congress Center Ballroom.

The board accepted the recommendation of its finance committee to set the 1995-96 budget for WMU, SBC, at \$14,879,000. This is a zero-based budget with no losses.

The Louisville, Ky., NAC meeting will be July 1-4, 1998. NAC is a national gathering for Acteens, WMU's organization for girls ages 12 through 17 and their leaders.

The first NAC was in 1972 and has been held on a five-year cycle since. The last NAC was in June 1994 in Birmingham, Ala. The 1998 convention was set one year early so that it would not create budget conflicts for churches wanting to send their youth to YouthLink 2000, simultaneous rallies set for Dec. 29, 1999, to Jan. 1, 2000, across the country.

In other business, the executive board:

-- set the 1996 goal for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions at \$100 million and \$50 million for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions.

-- Approved the components of the 1996-97 social issue emphasis, Project HELP: Child Advocacy. The project will seek to involve Southern Baptists in understanding and meeting the needs of children.

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**10 Southern faculty take
early retirement package**

**Baptist Press
6/19/95**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Ten faculty members of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have accepted an early retirement package fashioned by seminary administrators at the request of a faculty committee.

The plan, which was approved by seminary trustees in April, provides a package of salary and benefits linked to the faculty member's length of service. A total of 29 faculty qualified for the plan, which required that age plus length of service equal 65. The package was developed after a request of the seminary's Faculty Committee to provide an early retirement alternative.

The ten faculty who accepted the early retirement package are Raymond Bailey, preaching; Betty Bedsole, Ron Boud and Maurice Hinson, church music; William Cromer and William Rogers, Christian education; Anne Davis and Donoso Escobar, church social work; Wade Rowatt, psychology of religion; and Marvin Tate, Old Testament. All retirements take effect July 31.

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Seminary officials have also announced a modest reduction in administrative staff, including a net elimination of two administrative positions in business services, one in academic administration, and eight clerical positions. Half of the eight clerical positions were eliminated by attrition, and occupants of the other positions are eligible to apply for campus job openings.

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**Crossover Atlanta yields
new Christians, prospects**

By David Winfrey & Sarah Zimmerman

**Baptist Press
6/19/95**

ATLANTA (BP)--More than 700 people made professions of faith in Christ as a result of Crossover Atlanta, according to preliminary reports.

The evangelism thrust preceding the Southern Baptist Convention also trained hundreds of people to share their faith, offered ministry to area residents and resulted in prospects for local churches.

Crossover helps saturate an area with the gospel and creates a climate to discuss spiritual issues, said Darrell Robinson, Home Mission Board vice president for evangelism.

"Crossover has a tremendous catalytic effect across the Southern Baptist Convention as people see and experience different models of evangelism," he said.

Crossover Atlanta included neighborhood surveys, block parties, street evangelism, evangelists preaching in local churches and, this year for the first time, a sports ministry in local youth detention centers.

-- Neighborhood surveys: Teams of two went door-to-door in areas near 65 churches. Surveyors asked residents whether they were involved in a church, sensed an increase in spiritual concerns or had any prayer requests. The surveys led to opportunities for volunteers to share their testimony and the plan of salvation.

The teams approached 10,563 homes, conducted 3,588 surveys and presented the gospel 1,366 times. They reported 111 professions of faith and 1,406 prospects.

-- Block parties: Local churches hosted 24 block parties. By Monday morning, 17 had reported about 558 professions of faith. In an evangelistic block party, churches invite local residents for food, entertainment and fellowship. Members then share a Christian witness with guests.

The parties attracted 4,552 guests. Participants distributed 4,150 Bibles and tracts. A Christian witness was presented 2,260 times, organizers said. At least 868 volunteers worked at the parties.

T.G. Ashford, pastor of New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church, called the party in his church parking lot an answer to prayer. About 60 people became Christians at that party.

"I believe it will have a great impact on our total community," he added. "The smaller children were excited to know, 'Is this what church is all about?'"

He said the Lord had given him a vision for his church to reach into the community, but he didn't know how to assemble the resources until he found a brochure on his desk about Crossover.

He praised the effort of out-of-state volunteers helping local churches. "If I could hug every last one of them, I would to say thank you."

-- Sports ministry: A 12-member softball team from Kentucky, sponsored by the Brotherhood Commission, played four games and ministered to more than 150 inmates at the youth detention facilities in Fulton and Cobb counties.

-- Street evangelism: Five teams sang and gave drama presentations of the gospel, resulting in at least 22 professions of faith.

-- Vocational evangelists: Several Atlanta churches had vocational evangelists preach in their pulpits Sunday morning. Crossover helps put the convention in a proper mind-set for its annual meeting, said Toby Frost, HMB associate director of mass evangelism. "It really reminds us what we're here to do. It's really wonderful that we can do the main thing the first couple of days before the convention starts."

Frost said he is especially excited about block parties because they help reach black and ethnic communities -- areas not traditionally known for a Southern Baptist witness.

"In areas that we thought were traditionally difficult to reach with the gospel, we are excited to have a method that is truly effective at reaching the inner city areas for Christ," he said. "We have finally found an effective bridge across which we can share the gospel."

In addition to organized Crossover activities, individual messengers shared Christ throughout the convention's host city. Three men from San Antonio arrived in Atlanta Thursday and reported 160 professions of faith before the Pastors' Conference started Sunday afternoon.

"I've never seen anybody quite so committed to soul-winning," said Keith Walker, Home Mission Board associate director of personal evangelism.

Walker was staffing an evangelism booth inside the Georgia Dome. Convention messengers were encouraged to pick up free gospel tracts at the booth and share them with people in Atlanta's hotels and restaurants.

The booth included a tally board of the number of professions of faith reported and number of times the gospel was presented.

Crossover is a partnership between messengers, local churches, associations, the state convention and HMB evangelism section.

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Striking experience among
many for Crossover Atlanta

By David Winfrey & Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--Everyone might not respond positively to the gospel, but Kevin Phillips said he didn't expect to get hit while witnessing on the street at Crossover Atlanta.

Phillips' story is one of thousands during the evangelistic blitz, which is held in the host city prior to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting.

The 21-year-old evangelist said a potential fight turned into witnessing opportunities. Phillips, a student at Southwest Baptist University, Bolivar, Mo., leads Whatever it Takes Ministries, a performance troupe that planned to preach 83 times in parks, churches and on the street during Crossover Atlanta.

As part of Crossover, the team used guitar music and games to draw a crowd at Little Five Points -- Atlanta's counter-culture community -- when Phillips started talking with a critic.

Phillips said he tried to focus the conversation on Christ, but the man became angry and took a swing, hitting Phillips behind his left ear. "Over the last couple of years, I've been wondering when it was going to happen. I didn't expect it to happen last night."

Immediately, about 50 people gathered, expecting to see a fight. Instead, Phillips said, team members jumped at the chance to share the story of Jesus with all who would listen.

The team was not intimidated about going into an area that might be hostile to a Christian witness, he said. "That's where we wanted to go. We want to be on the front lines."

Not all responses were negative, he added. Many thanked the group for being there and one person accepted Christ as his personal Savior. Like many Crossover experiences, Phillips said he thinks many of their conversations planted seeds to be cultivated by the next Christian witness that is offered.

"The next guy that comes along, (those witnessed to) won't see him just as a hellfire and brimstone preacher but somebody who cares."

The Little Five Points experience was just one of thousands of encounters during the evangelistic blitz. Among the others:

-- Jean Brown saw smoke coming from the direction of her church as she returned from three hours of evangelistic surveys. "I thought Satan was so mad, he burned our church down," said Brown, a member of Beaver Ruin Road Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta.

A car fire in the church parking lot, not the church building, was the source of the smoke. Pastor Al Stone said he believes the church will experience God's blessing rather than Satan's wrath for obeying the command to witness.

Twenty-nine people, including five from Kentucky and seven church members who had never taken part in church visitation, participated in the neighborhood surveys.

-- Ten students from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary received class credit for witnessing during Crossover Atlanta.

Crossover provides an ideal environment to practice witnessing, said Chuck Register, associate professor of evangelism.

"We believe you can learn only so much about evangelism in the classroom," he said. "They'll have the opportunity to witness to more people today than perhaps they've had in two weeks."

Crossover also showcases newer styles of evangelism, such as block parties, in which church members throw a party and witness to those who attend. "If they can see how a block party runs well today, they can take this methodology back to their community."

Students receive two hours of credit for participating in the event. While 10 students traveled to Atlanta, Register predicted more than 75 will participate next year when the convention is held in New Orleans. "We're excited about it."

-- Mark Mangum drove all night to get to Crossover Atlanta. He was part of the 12-member softball team touring two Atlanta correctional centers Saturday. The team played four games and ministered to more than 150 inmates at youth detention facilities in Fulton and Cobb counties.

Everyone on the Sport Reach team, which is a part of the National Fellowship of Baptists in Missions and is sponsored by the Brotherhood Commission, hail from Kentucky, and made the eight-hour trip by car.

Mangum worked at his Louisville job until late Friday night, made the trip to Atlanta and grabbed two hours of sleep before stepping up to the plate at Fulton County Youth Detention Facility at 9 a.m. Saturday.

The shortstop was exhausted Saturday night, but he wasn't disappointed. "The two things I love most in life are sharing the love of Jesus and playing softball," he said. "When you can do both, that's pretty much heaven for me."

-- Five people from Bowling Green, Ky., spent more time on the road than in their Crossover assignment, but they say it was worth the trip.

Members of Rich Pond Baptist Church drove five hours Friday, June 16, to participate in Crossover Atlanta. On Saturday they spent four hours helping Beaver Ruin Road Baptist Church conduct evangelistic surveys, then returned to Bowling Green that afternoon.

"It's a refueling thing for us," said layman Don Sutherlin. Another layman, Johnny Hunt, said, "We'll go back enthused. It benefits our church as much as any church we help."

This is the fourth year the Kentucky church has participated in Crossover.

The pre-convention evangelistic thrust helps church members prepare for "Crossover Bowling Green," a local evangelism emphasis in the fall, said Tracy Smith, associate minister of college students and discipleship.

People in the Atlanta area were open to hearing the gospel, Smith said. "We only got chased by one dog."

-- Shawn Madden, pastor of Freedom Baptist Church, Mount Vernon, Ky., was attending his first block party when a divine encounter changed his plans.

Madden said he was walking toward one woman, planning to witness, when another lady said, "Excuse me. I'm ready to hear now."

"I said, 'Well, that's why I'm here,'" said Madden, still grinning from the encounter, in which the woman made a profession of faith. "There's people that we've talked to today that you can tell God has brought them here."

Madden added he hopes to take this experience back to his church. "I've heard about block parties for a long time, but man, this works."

-- Participating in Crossover is "the only reason I come to the convention," said Bob Heath, director of evangelism at Adamsville Baptist Church, Goldsboro, N.C. Heath came to Atlanta Friday and helped First Baptist Church of Norcross with its neighborhood surveys Saturday.

Heath and his partner, Ed Stenbridge, a member of the Norcross church, led two people to make professions of faith. Heath said he'll stay in Atlanta for the Southern Baptist Convention, but to him, the most important action took place Saturday morning.

-- Crossover veteran Mike Dawson was on the receiving end of the evangelistic emphasis this year. Dawson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Norcross, Ga., has participated in every Crossover since it began in 1989.

This year, a team from First Baptist Church, O'Fallon, Mo., helped Dawson's church conduct neighborhood surveys. Dawson said his only regret was that more people didn't participate in the pre-convention evangelistic emphasis.

-- Between people not wanting to talk or not being at home, David Klee only completed eight evangelistic surveys in three hours of neighborhood canvassing. Yet the minister of missions at First Baptist Church, O'Fallon, Mo., said he wasn't disappointed.

"Two people invited us into their homes, and they were both looking for a church. And, we gave out a lot of tracts," Klee said.

Six people from the Missouri church came to Atlanta for Crossover and the convention. The trip meets two of Klee's goals: for members to share the gospel and to be more active in the Southern Baptist Convention.

-- Joe Mosley, director of ministry support for the Dallas Baptist Association, said he can hardly wait for the convention and Crossover to come to Dallas in 1998.

"It's going to be super," said Mosley, who led a 12-year-old girl to Christ during a block party. He learned afterward that the girl's mother also had made a profession of faith at the party.

"I can see this kind of thing all over the inner city," he said.

-- Suzy Q. Sunshine, Patty Cake and String Bean were among scores of volunteers helping Atlanta churches with evangelistic block parties the Saturday prior to the SBC annual meeting.

The three clowns, whose real names are Adrienne Miller, Julie Kwon and Jerry Miller respectively, are members of the Korean First Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.

They've performed as clowns for two years, usually for Vacation Bible Schools. This year they volunteered for Crossover and were assigned to Briarwood Baptist Church in Norcross, a church with a Korean mission.

Briarwood hosted a block party with everything from door prizes to a dunking booth. In addition to entertaining children, the clowns stood by the street in front of the church to wave at motorists and encourage them to stop.

Pastor Allen Welborn said he hoped the block party would result in people making professions of faith and becoming involved in the church.

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Evangelistic softball boosts

Baptist Press

Crossover Atlanta efforts

6/19/95

By Jim Johnston

ATLANTA (BP)--Opportunities to share the love of Jesus and play softball are enough like heaven for Mark Mangum to drive all night to participate.

Mangum, a shortstop for the Sports Reach softball team, was exhausted by Saturday night, June 17, but not disappointed after an eight-hour drive, two hours sleep, four games of softball and taking part in an effort to witness to more than 150 inmates at youth detention facilities in Fulton and Cobb counties.

Sports Reach is part of the National Fellowship of Baptists in Missions and sponsored by the SBC Brotherhood Commission.

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The softball games in the Atlanta metro area were part of Crossover Atlanta, a Southern Baptist evangelism effort prior to the start of the Southern Baptist Convention sesquicentennial meeting June 20-22.

"The two things I love most in life are sharing the love of Jesus and playing softball," Mangum said. "When you can do both, that's pretty much heaven for me."

Mangum and 11 other members of the team made the eight-hour trip from Louisville, Ky., to Atlanta for the project. For Mangum, that required working at his job until late Friday night and getting two hours sleep before grabbing his bat and glove at the Fulton County Youth Detention Facility at 9 a.m. Saturday.

His effort was appreciated by James Fraley, director of the facility, which lies in the shadow of Atlanta/Fulton County Stadium, home of the National League Atlanta Braves.

"These kids need to be around people like these guys -- normal, working people who care enough to do things like this with their free time," Fraley said. "Too many times, the only people they look up to and want to be like are either the pimps and the drug dealers or the superstars in music and sports."

"We don't want them to grow up to be the dealers, and their chances of being the superstars are pretty remote. So, we want to show them good, normal people, so they can be like them. Otherwise, they're going to be lost souls."

Matt Axline, a former starting guard for the University of Louisville Cardinals football team, did his part to make sure the youth he talked with didn't end up in that category. The 6-foot-5, 285-pound Axline showed Dylan and Noel, two 15-year-old admirers from the Fulton County facility, how to improve their hitting.

"I've been where these guys are," Axline said. "I never got locked up, but I did some things when I was young that God didn't approve of. I'm trying to do all I can to make sure they know God loves them and has a plan for them."

Robbie Spear, Sports Reach coordinator and architect of Saturday's tour, had no doubt Axline and his teammates accomplished their goal.

"These guys are committed," Spear said. "They love the Lord and they show it. I know they did that today."

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Missions leaders urge
open minds, hearts

By Louis Moore

Baptist Press
6/19/96

ATLANTA (BP)--With unprecedented opportunities at home and abroad for sharing Jesus Christ with unsaved individuals, Southern Baptist mission executives called for increased denominational response through prayer, giving and willingness to serve as missionaries.

Both Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin and Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis told the first-ever joint FMB-HMB pre-SBC missions rally the doors of opportunity to preach the gospel in heretofore unexpected places are swinging wide open.

"I see the hand of God moving so that all the world may know Jesus Christ," Rankin said. "It's not our mission but God's mission. We see God moving to fulfill his purposes. And Southern Baptists are part of that movement."

Rankin cited examples of countries, such as Albania and Mongolia, that only a few years ago were closed to Christian witness but today are experiencing strong church growth. He also cited strong Christian growth in regions such as Africa and South America where missionaries have worked for decades. He said he sees biblical prophecies that Christ would be preached to all the world being fulfilled with the worldwide opportunities that have developed in the past few years.

Lewis cited as part of that trend strong Southern Baptist growth in U.S. inner cities and northern rural areas where the denominational has traditionally not been particularly effective.

"Together, the Home Mission Board and Foreign Mission Board are fielding a staff of more than 9,000 missionaries," Lewis said. "Don't think that the Home Mission Board and Foreign Mission Board are competitors. We are completers; we are enablers."

The pre-convention missions rally was held during two Sunday morning worship services and a joint Sunday school program at Atlanta's Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church. Both Rankin and Lewis said they hope the rally becomes a tradition on Sunday mornings prior to future conventions.

Lewis told rally participants, "You cannot practice selective evangelism. God said, 'You will be my witnesses in every part of the world,' and he meant that."

Rankin urged Southern Baptists to respond when God calls them to serve on the mission field.

"God is answering our prayers -- he is calling out the laborers, but many are answering with closed minds."

He urged Christians to open their hearts and minds to the possibilities of being on mission with God and heeding his call to mission opportunities.

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