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June 20, 1995

95-101a

ATLANTA--Black Baptists excited, surprised at resolution.
ATLANTA--Executive Committee adopts resolution supporting WMU.
ATLANTA--Exec. Committee resolutions honor Billy Graham, retirees.
ATLANTA--O'Brien urges WMU addition to SBC restructure proposal.
ATLANTA--HMB exec. committee affirms Lewis' restructure changes.
ATLANTA--African American Fellowship backs racial reconciliation.
ATLANTA--Arguments rooted in history, SBC statesman tells chaplains.
ATLANTA--Josh McDowell launches 'Right From Wrong' drive.
ATLANTA--Colson calls on pastors to overcome evil with good.

**Black Baptists excited,
surprised at resolution****By Keith Hinson****Baptist Press
6/20/95**

ATLANTA (BP)--A group of black Southern Baptists is both excited and surprised at the wording of a Resolution on Racial Reconciliation, according to Gary Frost, an African American pastor and second vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The resolution, to be presented to messengers at the sesquicentennial meeting of the SBC, was well-received by members of the African American Fellowship, Frost said in a news conference June 19.

"There's a sense of surprise at the frankness of the verbiage in the resolution. ... There was a sense of shock, and I saw the spirit of forgiveness," Frost said of the fellowship's reaction.

The resolution will be presented to messengers at approximately 4:25 p.m. Tuesday, June 20, by the SBC Resolutions Committee, which met with Frost on June 17 to finalize its recommendation.

Appearing with Frost at the news conference were Charles T. Carter, chairman of the Resolutions Committee, and Richard Land, executive-director of the SBC Christian Life Commission.

Carter said the resolution will have more of an impact than anything else done at the SBC meeting -- even the Program and Structure Study Committee's "Covenant for a New Century," a widely discussed proposal for restructuring the internal workings of the SBC.

"But 99 percent of the United States really doesn't care how we internally do business," said Carter, pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala., noting that "the world is going to be watching" how the SBC deals with the racial reconciliation resolution.

Among other things, the resolution denounces racism, apologizes to African Americans for "individual and systemic racism in our lifetime" and repents of racism "of which we have been guilty, whether consciously or unconsciously."

The resolution was one of three on the subject submitted to the Resolutions Committee by the CLC, which had convened a Racial Reconciliation Consultation May 22 in Nashville, Tenn., attended by 14 Baptist leaders -- including blacks and whites.

"I think it's difficult to overestimate the historical significance of this action," said Land, who also met with the Resolutions Committee in its June 17 meeting. "I must say to you that as a baby boomer ... I think there are a lot of people in my age group who feel the very same way about this and are looking forward with a great deal of joy to dealing with this issue in a proactive way."

Frost said the need for such a resolution was originally expressed by Southern Baptist ministers who work in U.S. inner cities with large concentrations of African Americans.

"This effort was primarily generated by white urban missionaries, our directors of mission, who found it difficult to penetrate the urban environment ... because of the perception of racism within the Southern Baptist Convention," said Frost, pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church in Youngstown, Ohio.

"They felt this (resolution) was necessary ... in order to have a sincere working relationship with the brethren in the city," said Frost, who predicted passage of the resolution would have a "definite positive impact."

Land said his phone calls have been "25 to 1 favorable" toward such a resolution. "I will be shocked if we get less than an overwhelming vote in favor of this resolution," he said. "I believe we will get an overwhelming affirmation of the spirit of this resolution."

Though a few Southern Baptists have reportedly expressed concern over the notion of repenting for someone else's sins -- namely Baptist slave holders of the 1800s -- Land denied the resolution does that.

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"Anyone who is concerned ... in that regard needs to have their mind put to rest," Land said. "My great-great-great-grandfather was a slave owner. I lament that. I'm sorrowful for that. I am eager to apologize and to express remorse for that, but I can't repent for him.

"I can't change his guilt before God for what he did. I can just apologize to those who are the descendants of the sufferers and for that being part of the situation that we still live with today," Land said.

The 1994 election of Frost was "very conceivably in the sovereignty and providence of God," said Carter. "He's been very helpful and very open and very cordial as we've dealt with some delicate things. I think it's God's sovereignty that brought that about."

If SBC messengers approve the resolution, Frost is scheduled to speak to the convention and accept the apology as an African American representative.

"This forgiveness that we will be extending to our brothers is not based on merit," Frost said. "It is not based upon penance. It is not based upon 'you've earned (forgiveness) by making strong statements.' ... It's based on grace and mercy.

"It's not so much a matter that pain is gone, but it's a matter of the fact that because Christ has forgiven me and us of our sin ... the Bible clearly tells us that we have a responsibility to extend that same grace and mercy horizontally to anyone who seeks forgiveness," Frost said.

Carter warned that those who favor the resolution must not "turn against" those who may disagree. "Some people think they really are not prejudiced, but they really are prejudiced against prejudiced people," Carter noted. "I think it's very important that we have a Christian attitude toward all people, even those who may ideologically and philosophically disagree with us."

In most annual SBC meetings, the Resolutions Committee presents its first report to the convention on a Wednesday morning, but Carter noted the celebration of the SBC's 150th anniversary is on Tuesday evening and said the resolution should be dealt with first.

"The rationale behind it would be that we would do this first before the celebration of the past," he said, "and I think it very apropos that that be done."

The true measure of success of the resolution's intent will be up to local SBC churches, individual church members and those who elect the trustees for SBC agencies and entities, Land said.

"We ... will use this as an acceleration for encouraging Southern Baptists to observe Race Relations Sunday," Land said, "and to do so by having pulpit exchanges, having congregational exchanges. ...

"Our ultimate goal should be boards of trust and a convention that reflects the multi-ethnic and multi-racial makeup of our society. If we are able to wrestle this cancer of racism to the ground and throttle it, then ... we will see a Southern Baptist Convention that ethnically reflects our society," Land said.

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**Executive Committee adopts
resolution supporting WMU** By Linda Lawson & Lonnie Wilkey

**Baptist Press
6/20/95**

ATLANTA (BP)--After declining to amend the report of the Program and Structure Study Committee to include a statement of support for Woman's Missionary Union, the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee adopted a resolution of appreciation for the contributions of WMU.

The Executive Committee held a two-hour session on the eve of the June 20 opening of the SBC annual meeting in Atlanta's Georgia Dome. About one hour was given to the PSSC report, which will be presented to SBC messengers Tuesday morning.

The proposed PSSC plan, which would reduce the number of SBC agencies from 19 to 12, references WMU in a continuing role as an auxiliary to the SBC but does not include ministry assignments for the agency. PSSC members have said the committee could not consider assignments to WMU as long as it remained an auxiliary whose trustees are not elected by the SBC.

Earlier June 19, WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien had called for a revision of the PSSC report.

"How can we support a report which so easily dismisses the contributions through the years and which refuses to acknowledge the ongoing need for the work of WMU?" O'Brien asked during her report to the annual pre-convention meeting of WMU.

The Executive Committee resolution, proposed by John O. Yarbrough of Georgia and adopted with little opposition, states: "As we gather in Atlanta in celebration of 150 years of history, be it resolved that the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention express our appreciation to the WMU for their historic support of Southern Baptist mission causes, especially their promotion of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering.

"Be it further resolved that we look forward to the WMU's continuing positive support of Southern Baptist mission causes in the future."

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Earlier, a motion by Larry Otis of Mississippi to amend the report to include a statement acknowledging 105 years of contributions of WMU garnered about three votes. Several Executive Committee members, including chairman Fred Wolfe of Alabama, said they favored sending the PSSC report unamended to the convention for consideration.

"Once it's on the floor, the convention can change it in any way," Wolfe said.

Otis said in an interview after the meeting the resolution adopted by the Executive Committee "did not fulfill the need I suggested in the amendment. We need to affirm WMU in its relationship to the SBC."

Forrest Lowry of Texas said he opposed Otis' amendment but supported the resolution as putting the Executive Committee on record as appreciating "the contributions of WMU and that we expect them to continue."

PSSC chairman Mark Brister, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church, Shreveport, La., told Executive Committee members his presentation to the convention will "give thanks and appreciation to WMU. We will affirm WMU tomorrow for the record, for Southern Baptist history."

Executive Committee President Morris H. Chapman affirmed both the resolution and not amending the PSSC report.

"The Executive Committee honored the desire of the Program Structure and Study Committee to take the report to the Southern Baptist Convention. At the same time, emphasis should be placed on the fact the Executive Committee passed a positive, affirmative resolution on the relationship between the SBC and WMU."

SBC President Jim Henry predicted action on the PSSC report June 20 will improve understanding in the denomination.

"It is my sense that deep down we're going to come out of this with some things clarified that have been misunderstood," he said.

In a related action, the Executive Committee approved a bylaw change which will be introduced Tuesday if the PSSC report is approved. The bylaw change lists the entities of the SBC as they would exist with implementation of the report.

While the PSSC report requires approval only of messengers to the 1995 convention, all bylaw changes require approval of messengers at two consecutive conventions.

At the end of the Executive Committee session, Donley Brown, chairman of trustees of the SBC Brotherhood Commission, asked whether concerns registered earlier by the agency's trustees had been considered.

Wolfe responded that the PSSC had elected not to change the report.

Brown, of Jefferson City, Mo., said in an interview he was "disappointed" the Brotherhood trustees had not received a response to their concerns. He indicated they would be registered Tuesday on the floor of the convention.

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**Exec. Committee resolutions
honor Billy Graham, retirees**

By Lonnie Wilkey

**Baptist Press
6/20/95**

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee in a pre-convention meeting June 19 adopted resolutions of appreciation for evangelist Billy Graham and two longtime Baptist leaders retiring this year.

The resolution that honors Graham, who is slated to be the closing speaker at the SBC annual meeting June 22, cites his 50 years of crusade evangelism in which he has "preached the gospel to over 210 million people in live audiences, more than any other man in history."

The resolution also notes Graham as "a model of integrity, exhibiting worldwide the humility, grace, and courage of our Lord Jesus Christ" and recognizes his contributions to Southern Baptist life as "enormous and distinguished, having served not only as an ambassador for Christ, but also as an ambassador for Southern Baptists around the world to the extent that, in the eyes of many, Billy Graham symbolizes what is right and good and holy about the cooperating congregations of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Executive Committee members also recognized via resolutions contributions of Dan C. Stringer, who will retire June 30 as executive director-treasurer of the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention, and Milton Ferguson, who retires Aug. 1 after more than two decades as president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo.

In other actions, the Executive Committee:

-- accepted the resignation of Mark T. Coppenger, vice president for convention relations, who will become the new president of Midwestern Seminary Aug. 1.

-- Approved overseas travel expenses for Art Toalston, Baptist Press editor, to attend the Baptist World Congress Aug. 1-6 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

-- Received as information reports regarding Cooperative Program receipts, the SBC operating budget report and the 1995-96 SBC comprehensive budget.

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**O'Brien urges WMU addition
to SBC restructure proposal**

By Lonnie Wilkey

ATLANTA (BP)--Woman's Missionary Union was "not born by vote of this convention, nor will we die by it," Dellanna O'Brien told participants at the WMU national annual meeting.

In her report June 19, O'Brien said WMU's "mandate for service issues from a far higher authority -- the Father himself." And she issued a call to seek a revision to the Program and Structure Study Committee plan for restructuring the Southern Baptist Convention which will be presented to messengers during the opening day of the SBC annual meeting June 20.

O'Brien opened her report by listing numerous accomplishments of WMU from all levels -- local churches, associations, state conventions and nationally. "Were we given access to God's computer so that we knew the amount of time given lovingly by WMU members, and could attach a dollar cost, the value of service rendered would be staggering.

"How much has it cost the SBC? Not a dime. You have done for God what you would not have done for money," she said.

O'Brien acknowledged WMU efforts in the last year have been "generated in a time of great uncertainty for our organization" due in part to the Program and Structure Study Committee report which was released to and approved by the SBC Executive Committee in February.

The report did not state the contributions of WMU over the years; however, it assigned primary responsibility for the promotion of the home and foreign missions offerings to the respective SBC missions boards.

WMU traditionally has led in the promotion of the Lottie Moon Christmas and Annie Armstrong Easter offerings. Since the beginning of the offerings more than a century ago, \$2,070,1191,092 has been given, O'Brien said.

O'Brien noted she has been assured by FMB President Jerry Rankin, HMB President Larry Lewis and others that WMU will continue to be "a vital part of missions education and the promotion of our missions offerings."

"However, what is to be decided on Tuesday is not the assurances of these men and many others, but the acceptance or rejection of the formal restructuring report. Only that will endure throughout the years to come."

The WMU leader noted she has been told WMU cannot be given a ministry statement because "we are not accountable to the convention, since our trustees are elected by our membership, and not the SBC. In the governance of our denomination, I suppose this is true.

"However, what person could deny the steadfast loyalty and exemplary service of the membership of WMU? How can we support a report which so easily dismisses the contributions through the years and which refuses to acknowledge the ongoing need for the work of WMU?" asked O'Brien, who was interrupted several times by applause during her report.

She said she cannot imagine Southern Baptists supporting the PSSC report as it now stands. "I urge you to seek a revision which will include Woman's Missionary Union," she told the audience.

"If this is not possible, then we must consider Dr. (Larry) Lewis' recommendation that the report be sent back to an expanded, more representative committee for further study.

"The need of the world is too urgent, the call to share Christ with the lost of our generation and the next is too demanding to sideline the work of hundreds of thousands of committed, loyal partners in missions."

O'Brien promised, however, that if attempts to include WMU in the PSSC report were to fail, "all is not lost."

"God has given us a song, an anthem of praise to the God who desires that not one soul should perish. He has not taken that song away.

"He includes us still in his covenant for a new century. He does indeed have a place for us."

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**HMB exec. committee affirms
Lewis' restructure changes**

By Martin King

**Baptist Press
6/20/95**

ATLANTA (BP)--An effort to change a proposed restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention received unanimous support June 19 from the Home Mission Board executive committee.

The 32-member committee passed a motion calling for the same three changes board President Larry Lewis proposed two weeks earlier in correspondence with HMB directors and members of the SBC Executive Committee, which is scheduled to present the restructure plan to the SBC June 20.

"These changes are small but powerful," said Greg Martin, HMB director from Mississippi who brought the recommendation from the board's administrative committee.

Lewis told the committee his "simple word changes" will not impact the structural essence of the report, but "if these changes are not made, the report would change the mission philosophy of the board and could have a devastating effect on home missions.

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"However, if these clarifications are made, I will support the report wholeheartedly," Lewis said.

Lewis' changes ensure the proposed North American Mission Board would continue to work cooperatively with state Baptist conventions, while placing more emphasis in newer work states. The NAMB also would continue to appoint short-term missionaries rather than depend solely on career missions personnel.

Mark Bond, a director from Kentucky, questioned whether supporting the changes implied agreement with the entire report. "Although I support these amendments, I have concerns about other issues not addressed here," Bond said.

Stephen Swofford, HMB board chairman, responded, "These concerns are the hills worth dying on. If the report passes, we want these changes in it. They protect how we do home missions."

In other business, the committee elected two new staff members, Jonathan Kang as associate director, language church starting, and Larry Braley, associate director of missionary personnel.

Kang, a native of Seoul, Korea, has served churches in Korea, California and Texas. He was a professor at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in California and Korea Baptist College and has been minister of education at First Korean Baptist Church, Irvine, Cal., since 1989. Kang holds a master's degree in religious education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in Texas.

Braley returns to a position he held until last year when he became director of missions for the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania and South Jersey. He is a native of Louisiana with degrees from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo.

The executive committee also approved allocation of \$400,000 from HMB reserves to produce witnessing lapel pins and tracts for the 1996 Olympics to be held in Atlanta. The revenue generated from sale of the products will reimburse the reserve account, according to Ernest Kelley, HMB executive vice president of finance.

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African American Fellowship backs racial reconciliation

By Keith Beene

**Baptist Press
6/20/95**

ATLANTA (BP)--The Resolution on Racial Reconciliation gained unanimous support of the African American Fellowship during its annual meeting June 18-19 prior to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Atlanta.

Begun three years ago, the organization's purpose is to help sensitize the SBC and its entities to concerns of the African American community and to encourage the fellowship and cooperation of African American churches in the SBC.

The Resolution on Racial Reconciliation was a focus of discussion during both a Sunday morning worship service at Christian Fellowship Baptist Church, College Park, Ga., and a Monday business meeting at Greenforest Baptist Church, Decatur, Ga.

During the worship service, Gary Frost, pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church, Youngstown, Ohio, and SBC second vice president, introduced the final draft of the racial reconciliation resolution to members of the fellowship.

The resolution did not originate with the fellowship, but was initiated by associational directors of missions in various metropolitan areas throughout the nation, Frost said.

"I just want to publicly express my appreciation for Dr. Richard Land for his maintaining the strength of the statements in the original document," Frost said. Land and other influential anglo Americans steered the resolution through the process to be presented on the convention floor, Frost said.

"There is a true sense of denunciation and repudiation of the historic acts of slavery" by the anglo Christian community, Frost said, noting that although no one can really repent for the acts of their ancestors who lived in 1845, the fact that members of the convention are willing to recognize slavery as a sin can only help unify the convention.

"The spirit of repentance is a godly sorrow that causes a change in behavior from unrighteousness to righteousness. The spirit of repentance is definitely stamped in this particular (document)," Frost said. "This a powerful (document). We are not in an official business meeting, but I do not believe we need a business meeting to allow our hearts to vote that this is a statement of apology and seeking forgiveness."

During the Monday morning business meeting, Eugene Gibson, pastor of Mission of Faith Baptist Church in Chicago, detailed his participation as one of 14 members of the panel which drafted a proposed resolution on May 22, at the Christian Life Commission offices in Nashville, Tenn.

Preconceived notions about some of the anglo members of the panel proved to be wrong, Gibson admitted. He said he was "pleasantly surprised and shocked" to see sons of former slaves and sons of former slave holders working together in this manner.

Several of the anglo panel members even called for stronger language than had at first been introduced by African American members, Gibson said.

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Although most of the response to the resolution has been positive, Penny Ellis, of Montgomery, Ala., said there has been some negative feedback from both the anglo and African American Christian communities.

"Even in our body there has been some division," she said. "We need to try and rise above racism."

She went on to read a hate letter written by a man in Pine Bluff, Ark., who said he would leave the convention if the resolution is passed. The letter was received by Jere Allen, director of missions in Washington D.C. Allen is one of several anglos who have been instrumental in pushing for the resolution.

In the final discussion about the resolution, E.W. McCall, pastor of St. Stephens Baptist Church, La Puente, Calif., said it was time for the convention to put this scar on its history behind and move forward toward kingdom building.

In other business, the fellowship elected McCall, president; Gibson, first vice president; Joe Lyle, Fort Washington, Md., second vice president; Thelma Kennedy, Houston, secretary; and Leon Johnson, Chicago, treasurer.

At large members elected to the fellowship's executive board were Carolyn Shack, San Jose, Calif.; Byron McClure, Chattanooga, Tenn.; Phil Davis, Charlotte, N.C.; Fred Luter, New Orleans; Elroy Barber, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; Frost; and Ellis.

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**Arguments rooted in history,
SBC statesman tells chaplains**

By Mark Kelly

**Baptist Press
6/20/95**

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptists must understand the roots of their differences to have any hope of resolving them, a senior statesman of the denomination told an assembly of chaplains June 20.

James L. Sullivan, a former president of the Baptist Sunday School Board, a past SBC president and an esteemed veteran of denominational life, spoke twice to Southern Baptist chaplains in their annual convocation, held at Atlanta's Dunwoody Baptist Church. The conference was hosted by the Home Mission Board chaplaincy division.

William M. Pinson, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, also addressed the group at a noon luncheon. He praised chaplains for ministering in parts of society that churches rarely penetrate effectively. Because they are uniquely called and gifted, "the inaccessible is made accessible," he said.

"Southern Baptists need to be aware of the contributions chaplains have made, still make and can continue to make," said Huey D. Perry, director of the HMB's chaplaincy division. "Chaplains go into parts of our society where many churches cannot and, in some instances, will not go."

The 1996 Home Missions Study, "Going Where Others Cannot Go," focuses on the work of Southern Baptist chaplains in the armed services, hospitals, prisons, businesses and industries. A total of 2,343 full- and part-time chaplains endorsed by the HMB made more than 1.9 million visits and led 24,036 people to faith in Christ in 1994, Perry said.

Sullivan conducted a sweeping three-hour tour of Southern Baptist history and polity, tracing the roots of the 150-year-old denomination and explaining the forces that continue to shape its life and work.

The controversy that has troubled Southern Baptists since 1979 is almost as old the convention itself, Sullivan said.

"I've watched this disagreement develop since 1933," said Sullivan, a Mississippi native who recently celebrated 69 years of ministry. "It's been going on since 1851. It just didn't surface until 1979.

"If we don't understand this, we won't ever find a solution" to the controversy, he said.

Sullivan first explained how Southern Baptists grew out of the mixing of Regular Baptists and Separate Baptists in the late 1700s. The genius of the denomination lies in its blending the best of both groups and rejection of their excesses, he said. The Regular Baptists contributed insights about education and organization, while the Separate Baptists donated a zeal for missions and evangelism.

"Regular Baptists brought the skeleton and Separate Baptists brought the heartbeat," he said. "Together they made a perfect body."

However, the influence of another group in the mid-1800s affected Southern Baptists deeply and started a disagreement the denomination still has not resolved, Sullivan said. Understanding the source of that controversy and the motives of those who started it may help Southern Baptists reach agreement once again, he said.

Sullivan sketched a brief history of J.R. Graves' Landmark Movement and told the chaplains that Graves' campaign against J.M. Frost's fledgling Sunday School Board was motivated by Graves' business interests in publishing religious literature. Though Graves and his followers left the SBC decades ago, the argument continues between those who see literature publishing as a ministry and those who see it as a chance to make money, he said.

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Sullivan implored Southern Baptists to understand the denomination is still relatively young and to work hard to resolve their differences for the sake of God's kingdom.

"We are a teen-age denomination, and that's why we sometimes act like teen-agers," he said. "We're still trying to discover ourselves, and we sometimes mistake sibling rivalry for denominational controversy. But we can't solve our problems without understanding what caused them in the first place."

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**Josh McDowell launches
'Right From Wrong' drive**

By Brenda Sanders

**Baptist Press
6/20/95**

ATLANTA (BP)--Christian author and speaker Josh McDowell launched his "Right From Wrong" campaign, with resources made available at the Baptist Book Store exhibit, during the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting June 20-22 in Atlanta.

McDowell's book, also titled "Right From Wrong," is the centerpiece of the effort, providing a "biblical blueprint for passing on core Christian values to the next generation," McDowell said.

A cooperative venture among 47 denominations and ministries, including Southern Baptists, to address the moral decline of American society, the campaign's goal is to provide resources and inspiration for Christians to reaffirm that "God has given us an objective standard for right and wrong that is rooted in his own character and nature," McDowell said.

The Right From Wrong coalition commissioned the Barna Research group to conduct a study of nearly 3,800 evangelical Christian teens to determine the greatest challenges teens face in today's society.

Young people participating in the research admitted to lying, cheating on tests in school, intentionally trying to hurt others, viewing pornographic videos and using drugs and alcohol, among other things.

McDowell said the study reveals what he believes to be the root problem facing today's teens: "Even our churched young people no longer believe there are absolute standards of right and wrong. As a result, they are making wrong choices while thinking they are right choices."

McDowell said the cause of this mind-set among American youth is society's culture of tolerance. "Society teaches that every person's beliefs are equal to all others. Tolerance teaches that all truth is relevant and that there is no moral basis for teaching right from wrong," the author said.

Resources for the Right From Wrong campaign are the result of an effort by a number of Christian publishers and retailers, including the Baptist Sunday School Board, that have joined forces to develop a comprehensive educational plan including videos, workbooks, audio cassettes and musicals to be used by parents and church leaders to influence young people to adopt God's model of truth as "absolute."

In September, McDowell will begin a multi-city "Counter the Culture" tour with the contemporary Christian recording group, the Newsboys. As part of the tour, the author will speak to parents and church leaders, challenging them to implement the Right From Wrong campaign in churches. In each tour city, the Newsboys will present a concert and McDowell will address youth.

BSSB representatives also will participate in the tour, McDowell said, and approximately a week following each stop on the tour, training seminars will be conducted to equip church leaders to utilize the Right From Wrong resources.

"We must do something to teach our teens that there is an absolute truth," McDowell said. "God does not call me to be tolerant; he calls me to be loving. We must teach our youth that there is a difference between right and wrong."

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**Colson calls on pastors
to overcome evil with good**

By Russell N. Dilday

**Baptist Press
6/20/95**

ATLANTA (BP)--Telling Southern Baptists "you can't just sit there," Chuck Colson urged participants at the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference June 18 to become politically active and to "overcome evil with good."

Colson, a member of First Baptist Church, Naples, Fla., is founder and chairman of the board of Prison Fellowship Ministries, an international organization of more than 60,000 volunteers ministering in prisons in 69 countries. One of its most visible ministries, the Angel Tree, provided Christmas gifts to children of inmates in more than 430,000 homes last year.

Colson, an aide to former president Richard Nixon, was imprisoned for his role in the Watergate scandal that led to Nixon's resignation as president.

A month after his release from prison, Colson recalled, he was invited to speak to the 1975 Pastors' Conference. "It was there that I discovered Southern Baptists and shortly after I was baptized and joined a Southern Baptist church," he said.

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"But look at what has happened in those 20 years. The year 1975 was the year of the evangelical," he observed. Noting the popularity of presidential candidate Jimmy Carter and athletes professing their Christianity in public, he added, "It was the biggest thing to be born again.

"Now 30 percent of Americans don't want a fundamentalist as their neighbor," he said. "How have we gone from the most fashionable group to the most feared group?"

He then warned that liberties in America are "under assault." Citing a recent ban on the tradition of singing "The Lord Bless You and Keep You" at a school commencement, he said, "The real threat, however, is not just the oppression of Christianity The real danger is that we will become so fearful of crime that we will sacrifice our liberties for order.

"When people have had a choice between protecting their liberties or having order, they have chosen order," he warned.

Illustrating ways to establish order, he said, "I have a 'Colson's Law' that says there are two restraints in human nature: in here, the restraint of the heart, and out there, the restraint of bayonets."

To change America, Colson declared, Christians must show the country that "we worship the King, not the kings of the world.

"But what can we do?" he asked. "We do not repay evil with evil. We overcome evil with good. The essence of the gospel is that God sent his perfect, sinless son to overcome evil."

Describing three ways Christians can overcome evil, he said:

-- Love one another. "The world will know you are disciples by your love for one another," he emphasized. "We will overcome the world when it knows that we love one another. True Christians stand together."

-- Love others. "We've got to love everyone around us," he urged. "The world has got to see that love and feel that love."

-- Adopt a world view. "We've got to begin to see the world through God's eyes -- a biblical world view. The only way we can turn this country around is for Christians to go to their secular neighbors" and spread the news of Christ.

"We must tell them there is no virtue attainable outside of Christ," he concluded. "Christians do out of love of God what secular humanity is paid to do. Christians do it out of obedience. Our job is to explain that."

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June 20, 1995

95-101b

ATLANTA--SBC messengers approve restructure proposals.
ATLANTA--SBC President Jim Henry re-elected to second term.
ATLANTA--Speakers support role of WMU in work of SBC.
ATLANTA--Hispanic Fellowship broadens membership.
ATLANTA--Hispanic Fellowship seeks increased involvement.
ALBANIA--On-line prayer to stifle Satan is key change in Albania effort.
ALBANIA--Opportunity to make difference stirs their return to Albania
ATLANTA--Pastor's Conference voices Christ 'High and Lifted Up.'
ATLANTA--Preaching conference offers preachers added platform.
ATLANTA--Corrections.

NEWS ADVISORY: The Resolution on Racial Reconciliation was passed by Southern Baptist Convention messengers by an overwhelming majority the afternoon of June 20. A Baptist Press story will be posted later today or June 21.

SBC messengers approve
restructure proposals

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
6/20/95

ATLANTA (BP)--By a vote of almost 2 to 1, Southern Baptist Convention messengers adopted after 65 minutes of discussion the Program and Structure Study Committee's "Covenant for a New Century" restructuring of the SBC.

The June 20 ballot was 9,590 to 5,357 at the SBC sesquicentennial meeting in Atlanta.

Approval of the report reduces the number of SBC entities from 19 to 12 and sets in motion a restructuring process to be implemented by 1997. Messengers also approved a bylaw change listing the entities in the new SBC structure. The bylaw also must be approved by messengers to the 1996 convention.

Two amendments -- affirming the contributions of Woman's Missionary Union and changing wording related to home missions -- were approved by messengers. Both were termed by SBC President Jim Henry as "friendly" amendments "for the good of the body and harmony of the convention."

An amendment to continue the Southern Baptist Historical Commission, one of three commissions slated to be dissolved, was declared defeated in a show of hands vote. After the vote, a request for a ballot vote was ruled out of order.

Some messengers audibly protested the ruling, indicating they felt the closeness of the vote warranted a ballot.

John Sullivan, a convention parliamentarian and executive director of the Florida Baptist Convention, told Baptist Press the amendment failed by approximately a 3-to-1 margin.

Three times during debate, questions about postponing the vote were ruled out of order. In response to a question from Kyle Harmon of Batesburg, S.C., Sullivan noted the motion for a study of convention structure was made at the 1993 convention in Houston and referred to the SBC Executive Committee. He said the committee then was established and an interim report from the committee was given at the 1994 convention in Orlando, Fla.

"It cannot be postponed beyond this convention," Sullivan said. "We can vote it up or down, but it cannot be postponed beyond this convention."

Sullivan referred further explanation of the matter to chief parliamentarian, Lester Cooper, pastor of Valley Hill Baptist Church, Riverdale, Ga.

Cooper agreed the effort made to postpone the vote was out of order.

"When a body does not meet within a quarterly time interval, it cannot be postponed beyond the end of the meeting," he stated, declining further comment on whether, according to parliamentary procedure, there was any way the vote could have been delayed.

The amendment affirming WMU was jointly presented by Roy Smith, executive director of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, and John Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church, Houston.

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It states: "We recognize and affirm the valued historic relationship with Woman's Missionary Union as an auxiliary to the Convention, and welcome the continued voluntary contribution of Woman's Missionary Union in mobilizing mission prayer support, promoting missions offerings and stimulating the missionary spirit within the Southern Baptist Convention."

Bisagno urged messengers to "pass this amendment, put this issue behind us, lock arms and get on with winning this world to Jesus Christ."

Earlier, PSSC Chairman Mark Brister acknowledged he had received questions from Southern Baptists about whether the report gave enough recognition to WMU for its contributions.

"The PSSC unanimously expresses deep gratitude to the WMU," Brister, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church, Shreveport, La., said. "Thank you, WMU, for supporting, giving and praying for Southern Baptist missions." He said he anticipates "continued support of WMU for Southern Baptist missions."

Brister also reiterated to messengers the PSSC dealt only with SBC entities whose trustees are elected by the convention. He also contended that assignment of responsibility for annual home and foreign missions offerings to the two mission boards was "consistent with practice of prior years. Promotion of offerings hasn't been in program statements of WMU."

After the session, WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien said she was "very satisfied" with the amendment approved by messengers, noting it affirmed WMU's presence and partnership in the denomination.

Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis proposed three wording changes affecting the work of the new North American Mission Board to be formed by the merger of Home Mission Board, Radio and Television Commission and Brotherhood Commission.

Lewis's wording changes affirmed cooperative as well as direct mission strategies for the NAMB and authorized the NAMB to support shorter-term missionaries as well as career missionaries. A third change in an endnote of the report calls for larger, primarily southern state Baptist conventions to fund "a greater portion of" their evangelism and missions staff and program.

Lewis said the HMB "has more than 1,000 home missionaries in these states. They don't want to be transferred to be state convention missionaries."

In a news conference, Lewis said state conventions want to continue a cooperative missions strategy with the HMB. "They don't want to see the Home Mission Board driven out of the South."

Lewis, RTVC President Jack Johnson and Brotherhood Commission President James Williams pledged to work together in blending their agencies into the NAMB.

"We're connected at the hip where the wallet is," Johnson said.

Added Williams, "The Great Commission of our Lord is bigger than the program structure of the Southern Baptist Convention."

The amendment to continue the Southern Baptist Historical Commission was proposed by Slayden Yarbrough, a professor at Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, and a commission trustee now serving as interim executive director.

"Economically, the proposal (of the PSSC) not only will not save money for missions, it may well result in the loss of funds," Yarbrough said. He noted the Historical Commission currently receives about one-third of 1 percent of Cooperative Program funds, or about \$500,000 annually.

"I personally have spoken with several state directors of Baptist history who say that their work will increase if the PSSC report is adopted, that they will ask their states for more money and that it will come from the CP funds that in the past were designated for the Historical Commission," he said.

Oposing Yarbrough's amendment, PSSC member Rex Terry of Fort Smith, Ark., said he did not believe "the fact that the commission only uses one-third of 1 percent of Cooperative Program receipts is an adequate reason to continue it."

In presenting the report, Brister called on messengers to unite in support of the proposed SBC mission statement:

"The Southern Baptist Convention exists to facilitate, extend and enlarge the Great Commission ministries of Southern Baptist churches, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, upon the authority of Holy Scripture, and by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit."

"We need to do better what we do well," Brister said. "Our mission is more than tradition. When God calls us into covenant, we must be willing to change."

The report organizes SBC entities in five categories: ~~world mission ministries~~ (International Mission Board and North American Mission Board); church enrichment ministries (Baptist Sunday School Board); theological education ministries (six Southern Baptist seminaries); Christian ethics and religious liberty ministries (Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission); and facilitating ministries (Annuity Board and Executive Committee).

He said the SBC restructuring will provide "less funding of bureaucracy and more fueling of ministry. We must quit tapping the pipeline and give more fuel to the front line."

Morris H. Chapman, president of the Executive Committee, called the PSSC report "one of the greatest decisions to face Southern Baptists in these 150 years."

Adoption of the report came as Southern Baptists celebrated the sesquicentennial of their founding in 1845 in Augusta, Ga.

SBC President Jim Henry
re-elected to second term

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention President Jim Henry faced no opposition as he was re-elected to a second one-year term June 20.

Johnny Hunt, pastor of First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Ga., nominated Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla. Henry served churches in Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee before going to Orlando's First Baptist, where he has been for 18 years.

Lee Porter, SBC registration secretary, cast the convention vote for Henry, who was welcomed by a standing ovation following his election.

"I'm overcome, humbled and honored that you would trust me again," Henry said. He also thanked messengers for their support and prayers during the past year. "I'm going to count on that in the coming year."

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Speakers support role
of WMU in work of SBC

By C.C. Risenhoover & Tim Nicholas

Baptist Press
6/20/95

ATLANTA (BP)--A standing ovation greeted the report of Woman's Missionary Union Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien from the estimated 3,500 registrants at the WMU, SBC, annual meeting when she told the group WMU was "not born by vote of this convention, nor will we die by it." The reference was to the omission of WMU's role from the proposed restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The value of WMU was echoed by numerous comments from speakers during the June 18-19 WMU meeting at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta.

That omission was addressed by SBC messengers June 20 when the restructuring was amended to include a statement of affirmation of WMU's work and contributions to SBC life.

During the WMU annual meeting, one of the 37 missionaries commissioned by the Home Mission Board during Monday's closing session explained that his going into career missions was a direct result of the grace of God and because of WMU.

Ron Lewis, appointed as a church planter in Calabash, N.C., told of his release from a 15-year drug habit when he was saved and a later call to missions after being dragged to a WMU mobilization meeting.

"Don't forget where you were when God found you," said Lewis.

William O. Estep, professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, writer of a history of the Foreign Mission Board, told the group that "the SBC would not be what it is today without the WMU." He added, "If the WMU is left out of the Covenant for a New Century (restructuring plan), the SBC will be less than it is today."

Carolyn Miller, re-elected for a fifth one-year term as WMU president, said, "Have no fear, we will be the missions organization for the Southern Baptist Convention."

In his challenge to the missionaries at the commissioning service, HMB President Larry Lewis said that the relationship of WMU to the HMB "will continue as it has in the past in the years ahead."

HMB Executive Vice President Bob Banks told the group that the HMB could not have survived throughout its history without the support of the WMU and that "there were times when missionaries would have been called home from the field," had it not been for the WMU.

Anise McDaniel, a 101-year-old woman from Clinton, Miss., told the gathering, "The world has come to our doorstep. We don't have to go overseas to do missions. There's a wonderful opportunity to do missions at home."

She also said dedicated women will "do the work and keep the principles of Christianity. No matter what we're called, dedicated women will do the work."

Her words supported an earlier report from Linda Johnson, a home missionary based in Atlanta, who told the women about the Christian witnessing effort planned for the 1996 Olympics in the city. These include a sports New Testament with the plan of salvation, a throwing disc which functions as a tract with the plan of salvation in six languages, lapel pins for conversation starters, and an interactive pocket guide to the Olympics which is also a tract.

As part of an introduction to the WMU's next ministry emphasis, former SBC President Jimmy Allen told the story of the physical destruction of his family by AIDS. Allen, chaplain at Big Canoe Chapel, Big Canoe, Ga., said his daughter-in-law and her son have died from AIDS. And a grandson and Allen's other son are dying.

WMU is producing materials to help churches minister to people with AIDS. WMU suggests several avenues of involvement: prayer, education and local and global ministry. Practical prayers would be in asking God for a vaccine, for preventive education, therapies and methods for compassionate care.

A mission offering during the meeting raised \$10,046 for the WMU's Vision Fund. Earlier O'Brien reminded the women that in 1994 they had led in the promotion of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions of nearly \$86 million and for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions for \$37.18 million. Cumulative offerings for both since they began more than a century ago were more than \$2 billion.

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**Hispanic Fellowship
broadens membership**

By Tom Strobe

ATLANTA (BP)--In action its leaders described as historic, the Hispanic Southern Baptist Fellowship voted to incorporate and to become a fellowship of churches, not just pastors, at its pre-Southern Baptist Convention meeting June 17-18.

The unanimous vote means the fellowship will begin work on a constitution and bylaws. The group also approved a new name, the National Fellowship of Hispanic Southern Baptist Churches, although it may change because of widespread dissatisfaction with it, a leader said.

There are 3,478 Hispanic Southern Baptist churches and missions with about 350,000 members.

The decision marks the "end of an old era and the beginning of a new era," said Rafael DeArmas, newly elected fellowship president.

"My hope is that we use this to give our Hispanic churches an opportunity to do what Baptist churches do, particularly Southern Baptist churches. What Southern Baptist churches do better is cooperate and do missions work through the Cooperative Program.

"We don't want to invent a new wheel. It is not our purpose to go out here and invent a new organization to set up another convention," said DeArmas, pastor of the First Hispanic Southern Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla.

Other officers elected are Samuel Aleman, pastor of First Hispanic Baptist Church, Atlanta, first vice president; Roberto Lopez, pastor of Bethel Hispanic Baptist Church, Las Vegas, Nev., second vice president; Eliseo Fierro, layman in Aurora, Colo., secretary; Manuel Castro, former president of the Hispanic fellowship in Arizona, treasurer; and Jorge Garay, pastor of First Hispanic Baptist Church of Pine Hills in Orlando, historian.

The fellowship also elected Oscar Hermosillo, pastor of First Hispanic Baptist Church, Comfort, Texas, as its first representative on the advisory board of the Baptist Spanish Publishing House, El Paso, Texas.

About 200 people attended each day's meeting at Briarlake Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga. The meeting was conducted almost exclusively in Spanish.

In addition to three plenary sessions, seminars were held on stress in the pastor's family, women and church growth, men as witnesses and youth.

Among SBC agency representatives speaking at the meeting were Don Kammerdiener, executive vice president of the Foreign Mission Board; Russell Begaye, HMB director of language church extension, and Paul Powell, president of the SBC Annuity Board.

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**Hispanic Fellowship seeks
increased involvement**

By Tom Strobe

Baptist Press
6/20/95

ATLANTA (BP)--Hispanic Southern Baptists should accept new responsibilities, but they need a hearing from the SBC leadership in order to reach their full potential within the convention, ethnic leaders said before the start of the SBC's 150th anniversary meeting.

A vote to incorporate and become a fellowship of churches, rather than only pastors, hopefully will be a major step in achieving such goals, Hispanic leaders said. Members of the Hispanic Southern Baptist Fellowship approved the action in their June 18 meeting.

"We're going to become the strongest Baptist Hispanic fellowship in the world, both numerically and with dollars," said Rafael DeArmas, newly elected president of the fellowship. "And we're going to do missions work, and we're not going to be hamstrung by rules and by boundaries. The whole world is going to be our field."

Such growth can be in the future of not only Hispanics but other ethnic groups, said Russell Begaye, director of language church extension at the Home Mission Board. Begaye's department oversees outreach and ministry to 106 ethnic groups with more than 7,000 churches.

In a future where the majority of the U.S. population will be ethnic, mega-churches "will be ethnic churches," Begaye said after the Hispanic fellowship meeting.

For those to be Southern Baptist churches, Begaye said, "Southern Baptists will have to intentionally invite ethnic leaders to be involved in the structure. At this point, that really has not been done, and it needs to happen."

This group "must not continue to be a stepchild in Southern Baptist life," he said. "They need to be officially invited to be involved at all levels."

Without the increase in ethnic growth in the convention, Southern Baptists would have declined about 3 to 6 percent in membership in recent years, Begaye said. Instead, ethnic growth has resulted in continued SBC growth overall.

Because ethnics "are finding it difficult to be, you might say, integrated or assimilated ... into the system in Southern Baptist life," he said, "... they're beginning to form their own fellowships ... so that they can begin to feel that they're a part of Southern Baptists."

While some in the Southern Baptist structure have questioned the need for Hispanics and other ethnics to establish fellowships, said Bob Sena, HMB assistant director of field staff in Hispanic church growth, those groups are "born with very good motives."

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Those motives for Hispanics, Sena said, are:

- providing fellowship with other Hispanics.
- establishing a link to help Hispanics understand Southern Baptist life and to involve them in the system.
- creating an awareness of Hispanics among SBC leaders and typical Anglo people involved in decision making.
- providing opportunities for training in the Hispanic context.
- establishing a cultural or linguistic identity.
- giving a platform for the recognition of Hispanics.

Hispanic Southern Baptists total about 350,000 in 3,478 churches and missions. There are 20 Hispanic state fellowships, and Sena expects there to be 30 to 35 by the year 2000.

While Hispanic Southern Baptist ministry began 114 years ago, it has "almost had to be an underground thing, because anything that they started many looked on ... in disfavor," Sena said. "I know one thing though, Hispanics are very loyal.

"I would call on Southern Baptists to affirm, encourage and empower the fellowships, because they are a tremendous medium or vehicle by which we can share our doctrines, our programs and our strategies ... to reach Hispanic Americans for Christ."

The fellowship's recent action may initiate a new sense of participation by Hispanic Southern Baptists, DeArmas said.

"Our idea is to give an opportunity to our people to really become owners of the Cooperative Program, which we haven't been" said DeArmas, pastor of the First Hispanic Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla. "My theory is that we're not giving because it was not ours to give to.

"Southern Baptists have always been very, very loving, very concerned about Hispanics," he said.

"But now I think we should be strong enough and mature enough to be Southern Baptists in cooperative mission work, not just receiving money. And in order to do that, we've got to do like Southern Baptists do; we've got to sacrifice; we've got to carry our own weight; we've got to give more than we receive.

"My preference is that we would give more than enough to do Hispanic work, so that then we'll be able to do some missions work somewhere else."

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On-line prayer to stifle Satan
is key change in Albania effort

By David Williard

Baptist Press
6/20/95

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Breaking Satan's power in Albania is the goal behind an on-line prayer initiative the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board will launch this summer in connection with Project AERO (Albanian Evangelistic Rural Outreach).

Project AERO -- a multi-agency effort to use Campus Crusade for Christ's "Jesus" film to take the gospel to all people in rural Albania within five years -- made a successful debut in 1994.

The film was shown to more than 20,000 people in 252 villages; nearly 3,000 requested follow-up information. Subsequent efforts by Southern Baptist International Service Corps personnel will result in more than 70 churches in Albania, a nation that became notorious in the late 1960s for posturing as the world's only "atheistic" state.

However, just as the project proved to be one of the most successful that Southern Baptists were involved last year, it also proved to be one of the most problematic.

In her year-end assessment, Mary Carpenter, representative of Cooperative Services International, a Southern Baptist aid agency, described the difficulties: "The volunteers, in many areas, faced unbelievable persecution.

... They were verbally threatened, had generators stolen during film showings, had rocks thrown through screens and saw AK-47s brought out to 'protect' them. ... We faced, and continue to face, severe opposition from Satan."

Increased prayer was high on Carpenter's list of needs for the Albania project this year, when volunteers, beginning July 2, hope to show the "Jesus" film in 300 villages.

Project AERO leaders want prayer not only to help volunteers overcome the difficulties but also prayer that more people will accept volunteer assignments, said FMB volunteer recruiter Bill Peacock, who is still enlisting Southern Baptist volunteers to spend two weeks in Albania this summer as part of the AERO team. Contact Peacock by calling 1-800-888-8657.

Randy Sprinkle, director of the Foreign Mission Board's international prayer strategy office, responded quickly to put both types of prayer needs on CompassionNet, the board's on-line prayer service.

He told Carpenter if she could provide daily updates on specific project needs during the 10-week course of AERO, he would post them on CompassionNet. When she agreed, he contacted the state Woman's Missionary Union office in Texas, Carpenter's home state, and asked them to get as many churches as possible to agree to read them daily.

"We see it as exciting," said Pat Luttrell of the Texas WMU. She sent out 400 letters to Texans on SBCNet, the Southern Baptist Convention-wide computer network that features CompassionNet.

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About 25 churches agreed to pray daily. Others will pray less frequently and others are still welcome to participate in the ambitious project sponsored by a number of evangelical organizations by contacting Sprinkle's CompuServe account at 70423,2130.

Besides Campus Crusade and the Foreign Mission Board, groups cooperating in AERO include Cooperative Services International, the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission (which maintains base camps from which the volunteer teams disperse), Helimission (a Switzerland-based group which has provided transportation) and Mission Aviation Fellowship (whose radio network for Christian workers has been called the lifeline of the effort).

In the past, Luttrell was frustrated because her attempts to support Carpenter with prayer have been limited to general requests. "When Mary writes us, her letters come about every three months. . . . God honors 'God bless the missionaries,' but he wants us to be more intentional and better informed pray-ers. This is another example of cutting-edge missions support."

Sprinkle sees provision of the specific, "up-to-the-minute" information necessary for focused, intentional prayer in such situations as a way to raise CompassionNet's usefulness to foreign missions to another level.

"In the old days there was no way of getting any specific prayer help," he said. "The Enemy rarely gave us advanced warning to write a letter home. Now we can praise God for the 17 who came to Christ last night, or pray for a lifting of the fog keeping the helicopter from taking off.

"Now the pray-ers are part of the project." Planners believe such prayer support will help make a successful project even better.

Last year, about 200 volunteers, including about 100 recruited by Southern Baptists, participated. "One of the most exciting things this year is that most of the volunteers for the project will actually be from Albania," Carpenter said. Nearly 150 Albanian Christian college students have applied.

Peacock called the effort "unique" in terms of its hardship for volunteers. "Not many projects go into a village to stay four days without a Christian community to relate to," he said. "It's cutting-edge. It will be hard. But to some people that's appealing."

Among the hardships: Volunteers will spend hours carrying heavy projection equipment along mountain trails and they will face intense harassment within some communities. Last year their ranks were debilitated in some instances by severe dysentery.

Still, Peacock believes that most volunteers had an exceptional experience.

"To be on the ground floor of taking the gospel to a people is profound," he said.

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(BP) graphic illustrations (vertical) mailed to state Baptist newspapers 6/19/95 and posted 6/16/95 by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Graphic and outline available on SBCNet News Room.

Opportunity to make difference
stirs their return to Albania

By David Williard

Baptist Press
6/20/95

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Ron Pracht still recalls the moment of panic. He was in prayer, interceding for the Albanian Christian woman who was closing out the evening presentation of the "Jesus" film in remote Perraj, an Albanian village where the gospel had not been heard in generations.

"All of a sudden people jumped up and started running forward," Pracht said. Mindful of hostilities faced by other Christian groups in the region, he instinctively "stood up to see if (he) could protect her."

As his heart raced against the onrush, his muscles tensed. Then it was over.

"They were running forward to hear more about Jesus," he said.

Pracht, senior pastor of Olivet Baptist Church, Wichita, Kan., was one of about 100 volunteers sent out through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board last year to participate in the first phase of Project AERO, a five-year plan to show the "Jesus" film in all rural villages of this impoverished, formerly "atheistic," European nation.

The response was unlike anything Pracht had seen. He found it incredible. Then he realized: "These people live in so much poverty, in such desperation, that when you offer a message of hope, they just reach out for it."

Like many of the volunteers, Pracht's experience in Albania was tempered with trials. In his case, severe dysentery almost wiped him out.

"Back home I would have been hospitalized," he said of the digestive ailment that sidelined him five days. He believes it was caused by drinking contaminated water. "But where I was there were no hospitals."

Although he had served short-term assignments in places like Uzbekistan and Zambia, the Albania trip he called the most severe.

"I lived in a grass hut in Africa for a week. Physically this was more grueling," he said.

Still he's going back this year. Only in Albania, he said, was he able to identify with what it must have been like for the Apostle Paul, who had the honor and the challenge of taking the gospel to people for the first time.

"I have to go back," he said. "This is a unique opportunity to make a difference in the world."

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Pastor's Conference voices
Christ 'High and Lifted Up'

By Dwayne Hastings

ATLANTA (BP)--More than 13,000 pastors and their spouses enjoyed a season of inspiration during the 1995 Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference at the Georgia Dome, a structure known more for gridiron clashes than spiritual confabs in Atlanta.

The June 18-19 conference, focused on a "High and Lifted Up" theme, preceded the opening of the 1995 Southern Baptist Convention, June 20-22.

"I am here to encourage you, to tell you there is a reason to be encouraged despite the extreme difficulty you may be facing," John MacArthur said. "We need a vision of the glorified Christ."

MacArthur, pastor of Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, Calif., told the conference: "We need the Lord high and lifted up so we can get things in perspective We are called to minister in a sense of awe, of reverence, of holy fear."

The future of the United States is contingent upon Christians proclaiming Christ high and lifted up, Fred Luter warned.

"I believe America's greatest problem is she's suffering from a severe case of spiritual malnutrition," said Luter, pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans. "And the only remedy, the only antidote, the only hope is for the church to stand up and be the church and lift him up and proclaim the name of our Lord and Savior to a dying world."

Ravi Zacharias, an Atlanta-based speaker and author, noted violence in society is now being blamed by psychologists on a lack of fathers in the home. "If there are no fathers in the home and violence is breaking out, what else could we have expected when we evicted the creator Father, the Father who has made us? We have evicted him from the cosmic scene. That's why we are living in a world which has gone so wrong."

Evangelist Junior Hill from Hartselle, Ala., said the times demand the gospel be preached in season and out of season. "Sometimes the man of God looks at things too carefully and misses what God is doing -- seemingly more interested in Barna (a public opinion researcher) than the Bible," Hill said, cautioning an obsession with the winds of opinion often brings discouragement.

"When it is a good time, a good opportunity and a good occasion and when it is not a good time or a good opportunity or a good occasion, the gospel should be proclaimed," Hill said.

Ronnie Floyd, pastor of First Baptist Church, Springdale, Ark., insisted, "It is time for revival. It is time for us to repent of sin, to seek God with our whole heart and for God to take a God-powerful, soul-searching, glory-filled revival. It can happen. You need to let go and let God do what he needs to do."

"Whatever you do, don't miss heaven," exhorted Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.

"An adequate consciousness of both heaven and hell would increase our gratification to God and stir the waters of our baptismal pools," Patterson noted. Preachers remain too sensitive of what others are going to think, he noted, saying many are more afraid of preaching about hell than going there.

"Culture has almost blinded us to the yawning chasm of eternity," Patterson said.

God has given the church eternal values that will survive through history and that will work in any culture, said Gene Getz, senior pastor of Fellowship Bible Church North, Plano, Texas.

"The tragedy of today is that we too often serve the organization instead of allowing the organization to serve the purpose of Jesus Christ," Getz said.

He said the question every body of believers in history must ask is: "Do we have the structure to carry out these supra-cultural dimensions of the faith?"

"It is so easy to lock into tradition rather than the truth -- into form over function," Getz said. "Our methodology should grow out of our commitment to the Word of God."

Jerry Vines said sin is as old as the Garden of Eden yet as current as what is happening in the U.S. today. "Sin is a serious matter -- our contemporary culture would have us believe otherwise," said Vines, co-pastor of First Baptist Church Jacksonville, Fla.,

"The Bible teaches sin is a poison of satanic origin that has infected the whole of mankind," Vines said. He said everywhere sin steps it leaves its mark and upon everything it touches it leaves its stain. "Sin is the leprosy of the heart," Vines said.

Sinners don't need their transgressions whitewashed; they need to be washed white, he added. "It is the high cost of cleansing sin that required the shedding of blood on Calvary," Vines said.

"It was on Calvary that Jesus Christ was between two thieves high and lifted up," said John Phillips, author and minister from Memphis, Tenn. The occasion of Christ's crucifixion, he said, brought a "horror of great darkness" in which God reached out and put his hand on the sanctuary.

The veil in the temple was to keep the people out of the presence of God, Phillips said. "For 1,500 years the veil stood between the holy place and the holy of holies and God was saying, 'Don't you dare come in here,'" he said.

As Jesus hung on the cross at Calvary, he put his hand upon the veil and rent it so it was "hanging like a ruined rag," he said. "Now God was saying 'Come on in, whenever you like and stay as long as you like. Ask for anything you like.'"

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Adrian Rogers said when one recognizes Christ as his Savior he is born for battle. "You were born for victory -- God is calling us to victory." Rogers said the people of God must take hold of the weapon of God but let God's strength be their strength.

It is time Christians depended on God and what he can do, Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Cordova, Tenn., said, telling the Georgia Dome crowd they can expect trouble if they are true to their calling. "Don't get the idea it is always going to be all honey and no bees," he said.

With an emphasis on strengthening the family in the midst of this battle, Jerry Sutton, pastor of Two Rivers Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn., noted it is not just secular families who are under attack today. "Many ministry families are on the rocks."

Sutton challenged his listeners to make family a priority by loving one another, modeling what they believe and guiding and guarding their children.

"The homes of pastors are under greater attack and experience greater crises than ever before," agreed Danny Akin, asking rhetorically what it was that caused pastors to become disasters as husbands.

"I have never met a man who lost his ministry because they spent too much time with their wife and children," said Akin, dean of students at Southeastern Seminary. "My church will not suffer if I give my best to my Savior, wife and children."

"While men are looking for strong starters, God is looking for finishers," Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church, Dallas, told conference attendees.

"If we finish strong, it's because of the one within us. He alone can get us across the finish line," Graham said, emphasizing that Christians must be determined to "stay after souls, stay in Scripture, keep family strong and be accountable to others."

Johnny Hunt, elected as president of 1996 Pastor's Conference, said: "It is my prayer that Jesus will continue to be lifted high." Bob Pittman, of Kirby Woods Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn., was elected as the conference's vice president. Elected secretary-treasurer was Paul Childress, Concord Baptist Church, Granite, N.C.

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Contributing to this story were Jan Johnsonius, Lacy Thompson, James Dotson, Michael Clingenpeel and Russell N. Dilday.

Preaching conference offers
preachers added platform

By Barbara Denman

Baptist Press
6/20/95

ATLANTA (BP)--A crowd of 300 to 400 heard words of encouragement and calls to spiritual holiness and servanthood during the "Building His Church" Preaching and Worship Conference, June 18-19 at Wieuca Road Baptist Church in Atlanta.

The meeting was held simultaneous to the Southern Baptist Pastor's Conference to give a national platform to "great Southern Baptist preachers" who do not have such an opportunity to preach before one, said Don Letzring, conference coordinator.

Letzring, pastor of the Wellwood Baptist Church, Tampa, Fla., said the SBC Pastors' Conference was created originally "to represent the wide spectrum of preaching in the Southern Baptist circles. But in the past dozen years or so, leaders of the Pastors' Conference have chosen to narrow" the spectrum of preaching, he said.

A call for pastors to assume a servant's heart came from Phil Lineberger, pastor of First Baptist Church, Tyler, Texas, who said the model of service came from Jesus, who "worked among people who were constantly rejecting him."

Ministers with servant hearts will demonstrate vision for the person; compassion beyond cynicism and skepticism; devotion from prayer; and action.

Lineberger said a servant's heart was personified in the life of a woman who drove him to church as a child of 10 living in the projects. He made a profession of faith at church during one of those trips, a product of her servant's heart. "She was a Christian, knew the Lord, saw a need, felt the need, prayed about the need and put it into action."

Crises in people's lives will never come at a convenient time, promised William Hull, provost of Samford University, Birmingham, Ala. Hull cited the example of two cruise ships traveling near the Titanic on the night it capsized. The Carpathia, although many miles away, rushed to rescue those who were drowning and saved countless lives. The crew of the California, only four miles away, saw the Titanic's lights on the horizon, notified the captain four times, but never turned on the radio to learn of the luxury liner's danger.

Too often, Hull said, church members send off flares to notify their pastors of dangerous seas they are sailing, he said. But "lulled into a sense of false security, we don't know how to read the message."

"How many times have clues and whispers of the hurting gone off like flares in the dark skies?" he asked. "We can't hear."

A minister, just like the Carpathia, needs to seize the moment of opportunity when disaster strikes, he said. "Is anything quite as thrilling as participating in a situation that is life and death?" he asked. The church needs to be "ready, vigilant, responsive to experience the pinnacle of life" through ministry.

Brian Harbour, pastor of First Baptist Church, Richardson, Texas, encouraged participants to look beyond their own feelings of inferiority that come from negative input and placing false goals in one's lives. "We are more than conquerors," he said.

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Too many congregations are caught up in the bigness syndrome, thinking "maybe we don't quite have it," he said. "Many of us as Christians are paralyzed for the challenges of life. We have confused the idea of humility with the idea of inferiority."

Harbour suggested the feeling of inferiority can be overcome by remembering who we are, what has been given and what is expected of us.

"We're not about success as the world measures it, we're about faithfulness. Feelings of inferiority will dissolve in the light of graciousness."

Citing statistics that pastors suffer from low self-esteem, lack of close friends and questioning of their callings, Jim Dennison, pastor at Second Ponce de Leon, Atlanta, said, "These are difficult days."

Combined with that, "We're involved in the longest-running, most divisive controversy in the SBC."

Help, hope and encouragement can be found in the story of Ananias and Sapphira, Dennison said, where the central truth is "godliness is the key to the power of God. The holy life is key to the power of God."

Dan Francis, pastor of the First Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn., cited passages from Acts to plea for a gospel unhindered.

Saying television and movies today are the two most powerful forces in culture, Francis added, "Christ is not against culture. He's seeping his way into culture."

Francis said Christ was not "in isolation" from culture, but in "permeation."

Francis said the "boomers" and "busters" in the world are looking to see if their names are included in the book of the family of God. "Jesus created this new family. Water is thicker than blood."

It is difficult for boomers and busters to understand the gospel message, Francis said, because they want to see what they believe. The family of God tells the message that "believing is seeing."

"You and I are custodians of the message of God," he said. "We have to translate so ultimately they know that believing is seeing. We must make sure people know that they can be kings and queens, no matter what they are."

Evangelist Richard Jackson cited Paul's letter to the Colossians as a church whose reputation is worth emulating. Paul told the Colossians he had "heard" about the church and its faith in Christ Jesus. "The church ought to be known for faith and proclamation of Jesus Christ and the gospel. We have drifted from that in many ways."

The church also should be known for inspired love of the saints, Jackson said, which "astounds an unbelieving world."

The passage also teaches "hope that is security deposited in Christ Jesus."

"It ruins your witness in Christ to commiserate" with others, he said. Jackson said his hope was not built on city, county, state or national governments: "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' love and righteousness."

And lastly, a church's reputation must be centered on its fruit. "Why do we you, you will bring fruit."

According to Letzring, a similar conference will be held in 1996 during the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans, if there is interest. Several well-known preachers have indicated a desire to speak during that meeting, he said.

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CORRECTIONS:

-- In the 6/19/95 (BP) story, "Striking experience among many for Crossover Atlanta," please correct the eighth paragraph from the end to read, "... convention and Crossover to come to Dallas in 1997."

-- In the 6/20/95 (BP) story, "O'Brien urges WMU addition to SBC restructure proposal," please correct the seventh paragraph to read "\$2,070,191,092 has been given, ..."

Thanks,
Baptist Press
