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

Court dismisses prayer ban,
leaves confusion on issue

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
6/27/95

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court set aside a lower-court ruling against student-initiated graduation prayer but did nothing to clarify the status of the practice nationally in a recent action.

The justices' June 26 decision in Joint School District v. Harris vacated a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals' ruling and ordered the lower court to dismiss the case as moot, apparently because the student filing the suit has graduated.

The appeals court had overturned a federal court decision by ruling student-determined, student-led prayer at a high school graduation was a violation of the First Amendment's establishment clause. A Grangeville, Idaho, high school had allowed senior students to make decisions about their graduation ceremony. The class voted to have an invocation and benediction. A dissenting senior filed suit.

The court's action dismisses a ruling which was binding on the nine western states which compose the Ninth Circuit, but it has no effect on the rest of the country. A mixture of decisions has followed the Supreme Court's 1992 Lee v. Weisman opinion, which struck down school-controlled graduation prayer. In Lee, the administration of a Rhode Island middle school had decided to have a prayer at its graduation, had selected a rabbi to pray and had approved the content of the prayer.

The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals later ruled in favor of student-initiated, student-led graduation prayer, declaring the Lee opinion did not apply. In 1993, the Supreme Court chose not to review the case, leaving the lower court opinion binding in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi.

"The Supreme Court continues to give mixed signals at the busy intersection of church and state, where prayer and public schools often collide," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"The Lee decision gave a red light to officially planned prayers but seemed to give a green light to student-initiated prayers. The Ninth Circuit in Harris switched to a red light to stop even student-led invocations or benedictions. By its action, the Supreme Court, in effect, just turned off the red light without giving any other new signal."

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Church-state representatives on opposing sides agreed the court's failure to accept the case was unfortunate.

"This leaves educators in the West and in most states in the fog," said Steve McFarland of the Christian Legal Society in a prepared statement. "The Harris case seemed like a good candidate for resolving the continuing controversy. ... (W)e'll have to live with uncertainty for now."

Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said in a written statement the court's act "was irresponsible and short-sighted. ... (W)e need a definitive word from the high court. Instead of giving guidance, the court today shamefully abandoned its role and dodged the issue."

Whitehead said the action "provides another example of the need to adopt a religious equality amendment to the Constitution to send a clear signal to public officials that privately initiated and led prayer and religious expression must not be subjected to discrimination or censorship at public meetings."

Several religious liberty organizations have been working with Rep. Ernest Istook, R.-Okla., to write an amendment protecting religious expression in the public square. Congressional hearings are being held on the issue through the end of July, but a proposal has not been introduced.

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HMB dedicates building,
urges reaching nation

By Sarah Zimmerman & David Winfrey

Baptist Press
6/27/95

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)--Home Mission Board leaders dedicated a new national office building during the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting, saying the offices will assist them accomplish their goal of reaching people for Christ.

In addition to offices for 340 staff members, the building will be used by a new church, said Larry Lewis, HMB president. The Church at North Point will meet in the board's 500-seat multi-purpose room.

About 2,000 people attended the June 21 open house and outdoor dedication service which was shortened by rain.

The 34-acre site was purchased in 1990, and the building was funded primarily through the sale of the board's former location in midtown Atlanta. The new building has approximately 184,000 square feet.

Bob Banks, executive vice president, recognized people and organizations which donated money to furnish specific rooms or projects. "All of the gifts are for one purpose -- that people will know Jesus as Lord and Savior," he said. "The epitome of that is giving of one's life."

Joshua Grijalva, who served 52 years as a home missionary, 1941 to 1993, led in a dedicatory prayer for the building.

William G. Tanner, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma and former HMB president, summarized the Home Mission Board's 150-year history. "May God continue to work through this agency for one objective: to lead the nation to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ," Tanner concluded.

Danny Moore, director of business services and supervisor for the building project, said the effort has been "a wild ride," noting construction delays.

"The reason it's been that way is that Satan doesn't want that building built. He knows what is going to take place here," Moore said.

Building visitors included Jerry Reynolds, a 26-year Army chaplain. He said the office represents a renewed commitment by the Southern Baptist Convention to missions.

"As an Army guy dealing with other denominations, a lot of them are pulling plugs and closing buildings."

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Jean Carroll, a Mission Service Corps volunteer from Desloge, Mo., said the building "shows we believe in missions today and tomorrow."

"It's out in the woolies, though," said husband Robert.

The building is about 20 miles north of downtown Atlanta.

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Mission board execs report
highlights abroad, at home

Baptist Press
6/27/95

By Barbara Denman & David Winfrey

ATLANTA (BP)--God has given Southern Baptists a vision to take the gospel to the world and "empowered us that we might finish that unfinished task," Jerry Rankin, president of the Foreign Mission Board, said during his June 21 report to the Southern Baptist Convention.

Meanwhile, SBC churches are well on their way to reaching many of the denomination's Bold Mission Thrust goals related to home missions, Larry L. Lewis, president of the Home Mission Board, said in his report that same night.

"What I share with you is not what the Home Mission Board has accomplished, but what our churches have accomplished," said Lewis.

Rankin reported he has witnessed in his journeys throughout the world that "God is moving in his providence and power," recounting:

-- In China, churches overflowed with believers and one pastor worked with 100 groups of believers. No one knows how many Christians are in China, Rankin said, since more have been converted in the past 20 years than throughout all of history.

-- In Korea, 4,000 delegates representing 186 countries met to develop strategies for world evangelization.

-- Romanian Baptists, through their 1,600 churches, are united in a mission to spread the gospel in other eastern European countries.

-- The first Southern Baptist church in Mongolia was started last year.

-- In Cambodia, churches are being started in the former killing fields of the Vietnam War.

-- Nepal is experiencing record church growth with 150,000 Christians and 41 new churches organizing every week.

-- In Nigeria, 437 new churches were established last year.

-- In Mexico the number of churches surpassed 1,000.

God's movement can be seen in a great host of persons committed to serve as missions personnel, Rankin said. A total of 545 persons were appointed as missionaries during the past year, for a net increase of 123 missionaries in the FMB force, the highest in almost 20 years. Another 300 persons are awaiting appointment, he said.

Last year, 13,162 volunteers served alongside missionaries in short-term projects. Nearly 500 volunteers will be traveling to Kenya this summer to show the Jesus film to groups of nationals.

Rankin reported that baptisms overseas, which had surpassed a quarter of a million for the last two years, increased 15 percent and exceeded 300,000 for the first time.

"We were empowered by resources you provided," Rankin told the convention's sesquicentennial celebration, acknowledging receipt of the highest Cooperative Program funds and a record \$82.9 million in Lottie Moon Christmas Offering funds.

The world's doors are being opened to the gospel, Rankin concluded. "Not in methodology and strategy, but by the Lord all power is given."

Lewis told messengers Southern Baptists now have 4,913 home missionaries, 87 short of the Bold Mission Thrust goal of 5,000 home missionaries by the year 2000.

Other home missions highlights Lewis cited:

-- Southern Baptist churches baptized 378,453 people in 1994, an increase of 30,000 over 1993, which Lewis said was the largest increase in his eight years as president.

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-- Southern Baptists started 1,286 new congregations last year. The convention now has 39,910 constituted churches and about 8,000 missions, bringing the total number of congregations to nearly 48,000.

"We are well on target of reaching the goal of 50,000 congregations by the year 2000," Lewis said. Since 1975, the convention's congregations have grown by 11,000, while membership has grown 23 percent.

-- The Home Mission Board chaplains commission has endorsed 2,364 active Southern Baptist chaplains. The Bold Mission Thrust goal is to have 3,000 by the turn of the century.

-- Nearly 80,000 Southern Baptists volunteered for home missions last year -- 4 percent more than the Bold Mission Thrust goal. Of those, more than 2,000 are Mission Service Corps volunteers, involved in work for four months or longer.

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Addition to Resolutions
Wrap-up story for 6/22/95

Baptist Press
6/27/95

Editors Note: The following is an addition to the bottom of the BP story, 6/22B.BP, entitled "RESOLUTIONS WRAP-UP: Racial Reconciliation draws national attention to SBC."

Resolutions received by the Resolutions Committee but not recommended to messengers included:

--"On Working in Unity," submitted by Abe Hudson of Houston, Texas. The resolution was critical of state conventions that channel money to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, but committee members noted action by the 1994 SBC meeting in Orlando that instructed SBC agencies and entities to refuse money for the CBF. One committee member suggested nothing had happened since to indicate further need for action by the SBC.

--"On Widows," submitted by Adam Sanders of Newport, Tenn. The resolution, which was forwarded to the denominational calendar committee of the Executive Committee, would have designated the second Sunday in June as "Widows Day" in the SBC in order to emphasize the needs of widows.

--"On the Unknown Servant," submitted by Jeannie Swafford of Goodlettsville, Tenn. The resolution would expressed gratitude to people who work in SBC ministries often without much recognition or thought of compensation. The committee took no further action on the resolution.

--"On Reaching Our Cities," submitted by John Snyder of Bowling Green, Ohio. The resolution deplored the multiple problems faced by American cities and called for action to meet their needs. The committee decided to forward the resolution to the Home Mission Board.

--"On Outcome Based Education," submitted by George Schroeder of Little Rock, Ark. The resolution was critical of a particular approach to education and said OBE promotes "politically correct social values" and "New Age philosophies" to the exclusion of Judeo-Christian values. But committee members noted the passage of a resolution on OBE by the 1994 SBC meeting.

--"On Freemasonry," submitted by Mike Janz of Rosamond, Calif. The resolution claimed that "Freemasonry teaches many forms of heresy, such as universalism," but the committee referred SBC messengers to a 1993 Home Mission Board report on Freemasonry that was adopted to the SBC meeting the same year.

--"On Endorsing or Denouncing Specific Political Candidates," submitted by James Sulfridge of Tazewell, Tenn. The resolution called for "Southern Baptist leaders and agencies to refrain from publicly endorsing or denouncing any specific political candidate or appointee in the name of our convention or any agency of our convention." The resolution was forwarded to the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

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--"On Accessibility to the Physically Limited," submitted by Donna McDowell of Smyrna, Ga. The resolution urged SBC churches "to become fully accessible to all people by removing barriers of physical access and communication so that Southern Baptists will not exclude any group or individual from participation." The resolution was forwarded to the Home Mission Board and to the church architecture department of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

--"On God's Calling of Singles to the Ministry," submitted by Jesse Russell of Saratoga, Texas. The resolution noted the difficulty many single ministers have in securing ministry jobs, particularly pastorates, and called on Southern Baptists to recognize the value and legitimacy of ministry by single people. Committee members took no action on the resolution.

--"On Affirmative Action," submitted by Fred Hudson of Winchester, Va. The resolution was critical of affirmative action, which it termed "a worldly concept," and called on the SBC to "adopt the biblical concept of total acceptance of all born again believers." The resolution also said the SBC should "work to eliminate all special considerations based on race from all of its programs." Committee discussions noted Hudson's resolution would conflict with another resolution, "On African-American Theological Education," which was later passed by SBC messengers. (See story in SBC Newsroom, final wrap-up of resolutions adopted by SBC messengers.)

--"On the Use of the Term "Black" Instead of African-American," submitted by Jerr Smith of Wylie, Texas. Committee members referred convention messengers to the first resolution passed by the SBC meeting, which was the Resolution on Racial Reconciliation.

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SBC devotional speakers
address 'empowered' theme

Baptist Press
6/27/95

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptists must be empowered for the future with a cooperative spirit, evangelistic fervor and commitment to inerrancy, theme devotion speakers told messengers celebrating the convention's 150th anniversary in Atlanta June 20-22.

Nine speakers addressed the convention theme, "Empowered for the Unfinished Task," during the sesquicentennial that drew more than 20,000 participants to the Georgia Dome in Atlanta.

Southern Baptists "must abandon self" and work together like the people who started the convention in order to complete their mission, SBC Executive Committee President Morris H. Chapman said in the opening devotion.

Those who began the SBC had a vision of a convention that would be "biblically based and mission-driven," Chapman said. Today's Southern Baptists "are their legacy."

"This is our generation to reach" and Southern Baptists' task to finish, he said.

"It doesn't matter where you come from; it does matter where you are going," and it matters what you do on the way, Chapman said.

That future has a basis in an evangelistic fervor that serves as an inspiration to the SBC today, Roy J. Fish said.

Fish, professor of evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, reminded messengers of their historical roots.

In 1755, he said, a "formidable army" of 16 Baptists established Sandy Creek Church in North Carolina. Within a short time, the congregation grew to 606 members who were responsible for planting 42 other churches. In addition, 125 preachers came out of the church's membership in just a few years.

When this "invasion of Separate Baptists" first occurred, Fish noted, there were only 28 Baptist churches in all of the South. But a little more than 30 years later, there were 410 Baptist churches in the South, accounting for more than half the Baptists in the United States.

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"They had learned that Spirit-empowered evangelism was the open secret of church growth," Fish proclaimed.

"Aggressive evangelism was in the blood of these Separate Baptists, and in 1845, when the Southern Baptist Convention came into existence, the genes and chromosomes of evangelistic emphasis came into our bloodstream primarily from them," he said.

The future also is secured because of Baptists' commitment to inerrancy, said Southern Baptist stalwart W.A. Criswell.

The past and future of the Southern Baptist Convention are bright because of a commitment to the inerrancy of the Bible, Criswell said.

It is a reason for "infinite thanksgiving to God from my deepest soul that our convention and our churches, our pastors and our leaders have built" the SBC's outreach to the world "upon the infallible and inspired and inerrant and authoritative Word of God," said Criswell, senior pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Dallas.

This commitment "on the part of our forefathers and upon our leaders of our convention at this present moment is a harbinger of portent and a promise of the direction of our convention and our churches in these years that are yet to come," he said.

But it is the individual churches that represent the power of the Southern Baptist Convention, noted Robert E. Naylor,

Naylor, president emeritus of Southwestern Seminary, said, "a New Testament church is a miracle."

As recorded in Matthew 16:13-19, Naylor referenced, Jesus proclaimed the establishment of his church at Caesarea Philippi when he asked his disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" and Peter responded, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus told Peter, "Upon this rock I will build my church."

In this Scripture passage, Naylor said, "Jesus announced that which had never been. It was to be the ultimate expression of his divine authority. It was to be the ultimate eventuality of a believer's salvation -- a New Testament church."

The former seminary president continued, "We Baptists say that our churches are New Testament churches, first of all because we recognize Jesus as Lord, and (second because) in the New Testament, we're to find our structure, our doctrine, our mission, the definition of our generation, the expectancy that belongs to every believer in Christ Jesus."

A current seminary president focused on Southern Baptist education, saying it must be characterized by respectable scholarship, reverent scholarship, courageous scholarship and liberating scholarship.

"Our students must be conversant with the ideas of the world in order to minister to the world," said Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.

The churches of the convention have been unified by Sunday school that presents Southern Baptists an opportunity "to unite ourselves behind the Bible we are arguing about," said James L. Sullivan, retired president of the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn., and a senior Southern Baptist statesman and historian.

Sullivan urged those attending to be like Daniel, with the "Bible hidden in the heart, revealed in the light so the world will see the message revealed in us."

Through the 150-year history of the Southern Baptist Convention, the denomination has contributed a distinctive soul competency as perhaps its greatest contribution to religious thought, Baptist statesman Herschel H. Hobbs said.

Hobbs, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, and a former president of the SBC, is known for his leadership in revising an early Baptist statement of faith resulting in the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message statement.

"I want us to look at the phrase, 'the competency of the soul in religion,'" Hobbs said. "Does that mean you could believe just anything and be a Southern Baptist?"

"No," he continued. "What it means is that every soul is made in the image of God -- not as a puppet, but as a person with a right of choice -- and is capable of having direct dealings with God without the benefit of any intermediary."

Soul competency, Hobbs said, "means that I can be a Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Jew or a Muslim -- but I am responsible to God for my choice. It doesn't mean that there is an equality of all of these so-called faiths, but it means simply that I am free. God does not coerce the individual, or else he would make us puppets on the string of faith."

Through its various programs, the denomination produces individuals committed to the work such as Alma Hunt and Greg Horton.

"I am a product of the local Baptist church," said Hunt, the 85-year-old retired executive secretary of Woman's Missionary Union, who said she is still involved in programs such as Sunday School and WMU.

"I come with a bias in favor of missions," she told the crowd. "It was a missions organization in my church that turned the direction of my life, captured my greatest interest, led me to spend 26 years of my life with Woman's Missionary Union" and 21 years since then in continuing support for foreign and home missions, she noted.

Horton, a founding partner of Ryan's and Quincy's restaurant chains, and a member of Temple Baptist Church in Simpsonville, S.C., said he and his wife, Bobbie, both became Christians as teen-agers and were married before having been disciplined about "how to have a Christian home."

Through trials of life, Horton said he began reading his Bible and praying every day with his family.

"Folks," he advised, "if you're reading God's Word and praying, it's hard to be fighting with one another in your homes, in your churches and out there in the marketplace."

He concluded by encouraging the audience to follow the Bible's teaching of forgiveness to receive God's blessing.

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Compiled by Frank Wm. White.

Author: Long-term influence
involves more than politics

By John Perry

Baptist Press
6/27/95

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The 1994 mid-term elections marked the beginning -- not the end -- of a fundamental power shift in American politics, according to the author of a new book.

"Politics is usually nothing more than a dirty game of compromise and accommodation, to see if you can do unto others before they do unto you," said George Grant, executive director of King's Meadow Study Center, Franklin, Tenn., and author of "The Changing of the Guard" published by the Baptist Sunday School Board's Broadman & Holman Publishers.

"But the real basis of long-term influence, power and authority is obedience to God, not winning in politics."

Grant, author of 25 books who also has served as a media consultant, sees value in involvement in the political process. But he believes those who see politics as an end in itself are misdirected and shortsighted.

"Christians should never become involved in political action if this is the limit of our vision," he wrote. "If our sights are set simply on enhancing or influencing or aggrandizing the present world system, then we should forget it altogether."

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Instead, political activism for the Christian should have "as its primary intent the restoration of every aspect and function of the land -- of people, families, institutions, bureaucracies, courts and governments -- for the kingdom of Christ," Grant wrote.

He told Baptist Press his book "is an effort to deal with questions of Christian involvement in politics, in all their complexity, from the bedrock foundation of Scripture. It is my challenge to myself -- and to Christians everywhere -- to answer the most basic question of all: What does God desire for us to be and what does he desire for us to do?"

Grant believes Christians earn authority by serving others. They don't claim it by winning elections.

"Early in our nation's history," he wrote, "it was the church that operated the hospitals, orphanages, alms houses ... schools and universities. The church was a home to the homeless and a refuge to the rejected. As a result, the church had authority. It earned its authority by serving."

Political activities such as canvassing neighborhoods, registering voters and evaluating candidates all are worthwhile, Grant noted. "But if the church really wants to make a difference in the political arena, it will become a sanctuary to the poor, the aged, the handicapped, the unborn, the abused and the needy."

In the book, Grant has included how-to suggestions for political involvement by Christians. Also, each chapter includes summaries, including 2,200 Scripture references to challenge readers to confirm their understanding on three levels: "what you feel (heart), what you think (head) and what you'll do (hand)."

A section in the back of the book, "Resources for Action," includes thumbnail descriptions and mailing addresses for more than three dozen organizations as possible avenues of involvement.

"We aren't helpless pawns of history. We are history. I hope this book will encourage people to take their part in it," Grant said.

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Perry is a freelance writer living in Nashville, Tenn.

**Trucker finds Jesus
through bookstore call**

By Charles Willis

**Baptist Press
6/27/95**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Looking for a Christian who is not a preacher might seem a strange request to some, but Jerry Matthews felt his circumstances might be too harshly judged by a clergyman.

A trucker, Matthews was out of work, down on his luck and alone at the Flying J Truck Stop in Jackson, Miss., on a holiday weekend. Divorced from his wife the previous fall and estranged from his adult daughter, Matthews had also lost his trucking partner when they ended their relationship on an East Coast run. Mississippi is a long way from his home of San Diego, Calif., and getting rides west with other truckers had come to a seeming halt on Memorial Day weekend.

Matthews did not need anyone to tell him what was wrong with his life. He knew everything that was wrong.

"I was just about ready to give up when I saw a billboard that read 'trust Jesus,' and I wanted someone to tell me what that meant," he recalled later.

He thought if he could find a Christian who is not a preacher, he could decide for himself about Christianity.

Calling several Christian bookstores, he asked to talk with someone about Christianity. An employee at one store told him to get rid of his demons and find "the Ghost." At the second store, the person who answered offered only a referral to another store, the Baptist Book Store.

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After Matthews struggled to explain his need to the Baptist Book Store clerk, manager Eddy Perry took the call and offered to meet with him to discuss Christianity. It was Sunday night before the meeting could be arranged, but the conversation was a success. After talking about his life and hearing Perry tell of Christ and the "Roman Road," Jerry Matthews prayed to receive Jesus. Perry gave Matthews a Bible and wrote in it the verses he had just used.

When Gee Ogletree, who attends Jackson's Crossgates Baptist Church with Perry, wrote to the Baptist Sunday School Board, he referenced the store's advertising message, "more than just books for more than just Baptists."

"Many people might be surprised to find the Baptist Book Store is not just filled with books about Jesus," Ogletree observed, "but also with people who love him and are willing to share their faith."

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Campers' rally attracts 700
in motor coaches, fifth wheels

Baptist Press
6/27/95

By Trennis Henderson

HOPE, Ark. (BP)--Rows of motor coaches, fifth wheels and an occasional pop-up camper squeezed into Hope Fair Park June 13-15 for the 1995 National Campers on Mission Rally. Focusing on the theme, "Bein' as How You're Goin'...", more than 700 participants from 21 states and Canada traveled to the Arkansas park for three days of fellowship, training, recreation and inspiration.

National Campers on Mission, sponsored by the special ministries department of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, currently has more than 3,100 member families. COM promotional literature describes the organization as "a national fellowship of Christian campers who want opportunities to share their faith and the love of Jesus Christ while camping or participating in missions activities."

Participants have led more than 500 people to faith in Christ during the past year while conducting such ministry projects as church planting, construction, prison ministry, disaster relief and Scripture distribution. The missions volunteers also minister in such diverse settings as flea markets, race tracks, truck stops and nursing homes.

HMB President Larry Lewis voiced appreciation to rally participants "for your ministry in missions as you're going," adding "we're so thankful to God for what you are and for what you're doing."

Describing the Great Commission as Christ's "marching orders for his people," Lewis emphasized that the Great Commission "was not given to us to recite or memorize. It was given to us to do."

Highlighting the plan, power and purpose of Christ's commands, Lewis said, "The overarching purpose of the church is to get people saved and to get saved people getting other people saved.

"Can't is not in the Christian's vocabulary," he declared. "The power of the Holy Spirit is to equip us, empower us and protect us as we set out to do his commands If it's his will, his work, his assignment, he will give us the power to do it.

"I pray that we might have spiritual eyes to see the fields that are white," Lewis said. "Take the gospel and share it and leave the results to God Bein' as how you're goin', tell them about Jesus."

Dennis Swanburg, special assistant to the president at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, shared his trademark humor and impersonations during the rally's opening session. Interspersing stories of his childhood with impersonations of Billy Graham, Don Knotts, Ross Perot and Jimmy Stewart, Swanburg said, "Life is too short not to enjoy.

"Happiness is often determined by what happens, but we have the ability to choose joy no matter what the circumstances," he noted. "We need to lighten up, loosen up, laugh and live.

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"Missions and evangelism are everything," he affirmed, "but they're to be carried out with joy. I pray to God that we'll be on mission with joy."

Don Moore, executive director of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, asked the campers during the rally's final session: "What are we going to do about the lost?"

Warning about the ineffectiveness of casual evangelism, optional evangelism and accidental evangelism, Moore emphasized the key to effective witnessing is intentional evangelism.

Moore said intentional evangelism involves "developing a strategy under the Spirit of God by which an individual can present the gospel of Jesus Christ to an unsaved person."

"Will your present efforts to get people saved likely result in anybody being saved?" he asked. "Folks who never intend to share the gospel with anyone usually never do."

Acknowledging "we are so unaccustomed to people being driven with a spiritual burden," Moore concluded, "I pray in the name of God that this bunch of Baptists will have it in their hearts, one way or another, to tell people about Jesus."

In addition to the keynote sessions, campers participated in a variety of small-group conferences ranging from balloon sculpturing to RV maintenance. Conference sites varied from a fairground cattle barn to the shade of oak trees.

Elmer Gobel, of the HMB's volunteer department, led a conference about creativity in ministry. "We all have some creative abilities," he noted. "We must develop that."

Discussing ways to enhance worship and other forms of communication, Gobel said, "What you want to do in creativity is to eliminate all the barriers. One of the challenges we have as Christians is to creatively think how we can affect people we come into contact with each day."

Rally chairman Lendol Jackson, volunteer coordinator for Arkansas Campers on Mission, enthusiastically promotes the ministry of COM because of its "Christian fellowship, opportunity to witness in non-traditional settings and just the relaxed time of camping."

Noting that most COM members are senior adults, Jackson said, "We do construction work, backyard Bible clubs, resort ministries -- it's a matter of not leaving your skills in a rocking chair somewhere."

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Campers on Mission challenges
Baptists to 'witness as you go'

Baptist Press
6/27/95

HOPE, Ark. (BP)--Southern Baptists' Campers on Mission emblem -- a fish encircled by a compass -- is a silent reminder that the Spirit of God travels with Christian believers wherever they go. "Going" -- as in the Great Commission's call to "go and make disciples" -- is a primary focus of Campers on Mission.

Organized by the Home Mission Board in 1971, Campers on Mission has grown to include more than 3,100 families in 21 state COM chapters throughout the nation.

Clayburn Bratton, Arkansas COM president, describes the organization as "a great opportunity to witness to folks in campgrounds who never attend church. We are an extension of the church."

In addition to one-on-one encounters in campgrounds, COM members participate in a variety of mission projects ranging from church construction and disaster relief to ministry efforts at fairgrounds, racetracks and truck stops.

According to Pete Petty, an associate in the Arkansas Baptist State Convention missions department, "The idea is that since Southern Baptists have camping equipment and rigs and they're going to be out there, we just pray they're going to be on mission while they're out there."

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Madeline Allmendinger, president of Louisiana Campers on Mission, said the organization provides "one of the greatest fellowships we've ever had with Christian friends."

"The most important thing is getting the word of the Lord to people who do not know him," she emphasized.

Urging fellow campers to consider the benefits of COM involvement, she noted, "The Lord has given you a talent. Use it. Don't let it be taken away. You have this void within you that needs filling and this is one of the great ways to fill it."

Ed Hadden is president of Kansas-Nebraska COM, the newest COM chapter in the nation. He said the chapter, organized in 1993, has grown from 12 to 62 active participants.

"The main thing is Christian ministry and witnessing," Hadden affirmed. "When we go into campgrounds, people see our emblem and ask about it -- it's a great way to witness."

Ken de Cordova, who helped organize the Oklahoma COM chapter 19 years ago, is serving again as that state's COM president.

"One of Campers on Mission's main goals is to equip families to take Christ with them on their family vacations," de Cordova said. "Families need something to do besides go to Disneyland or just watch TV. It's something to help knit your family together."

Echoing the recent National COM Rally theme of "Bein' as How You're Goin'...", de Cordova added, "Everybody is going to go somewhere. You may as well take Christ with you when you're going."

Additional information about Campers on Mission is available by contacting the HMB special ministries department at (404) 410-6000.

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CORRECTION: In the (BP) story, "Pastors' Conference voices Christ 'High and Lifted Up,'" dated 6/20/95, please add the following sentence as the second sentence in the last paragraph: Hunt is pastor of First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Ga.

Thanks,
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