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HMB directors direct attention
to transition, WMU, chaplains

By Martin King

Baptist Press
8/10/95

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)--Restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention will not distract the Home Mission Board from its primary task of reaching the nation for Christ, HMB President Larry Lewis pledged during the board's Aug. 9 meeting.

Lewis told HMB directors "it would be presumptuous for me or my staff to attempt to unduly influence the structure of the new North American Mission Board Our task is to lead Southern Baptists in the most intensive evangelistic effort in our history.

"Neither do I believe the SBC Executive Committee should assume the role" of structuring the new missions agency, Lewis said. "Only the directors of the North American Mission Board can assume that function, and half of that board is sitting here this morning."

A restructuring plan approved during the Southern Baptist Convention in June would merge the Home Mission Board with the Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission. Forty-four current HMB directors will serve on the NAMB board along with 15 members from each of the two commissions. The plan must be approved a second time at next summer's SBC before it can be implemented.

To represent the board's interests in the merger, board chairman Steve Swofford appointed a transition committee. While no immediate action may be needed, Swofford, pastor of First Baptist Church, Rockwall, Texas, said the committee would maintain contact with the two commissions and the SBC Executive Committee.

Transition committee members are Charles Fuller, chairman, pastor of First Baptist Church, Roanoke, Va.; Ken Cheek, pastor of Northridge Baptist Church, Northport, Ala.; Greg Martin, pastor of Commission Road Baptist Church, Long Beach, Miss.; Wendell Lang, pastor of First Baptist Church, Pryor, Okla.; and, Ron Meyer, pastor of First Baptist Church, Zion, Ill. Swofford and Lewis will advise the committee and Gary Jones, HMB vice president for services, will be the staff representative.

In other business, the board voiced opposition to Woman's Missionary Union leaders' decision to produce materials for a competing missions organization, affirmed revision of the belief statement for chaplains and appointed 14 new missionaries and three new staff.

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Board members approved a motion affirming a request from their administrative committee that Lewis write a letter to Dellanna O'Brien, WMU executive director, protesting WMU's production of missions education material for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The CBF is an organization of moderate Southern Baptists critical of SBC leadership.

Although the motion passed by a 3-to-1 margin, several members expressed concern the action could be perceived as opposition to WMU as a whole.

"Our concern has nothing to do with the mission support of local church WMUs," said John Avant, pastor of Coggin Avenue Baptist Church, Brownwood, Texas. "Our concern is over this serious mistake by the leadership of the national organization and the resulting deterioration of our historic relationship with WMU."

The revised belief statement for chaplaincy candidates will add specific questions about authority and inspiration of the Bible. Chaplains also will be asked to explain their understanding of the Bible's miracles and historical narratives, and the statement from article one of the Baptist Faith and Message that the Bible is "truth without any mixture of error."

Chaplain candidates are mailed a copy of the Baptist Faith and Message and other documents when they apply for their first endorsement. The Chaplains Commission voted to add the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy, addressing the nature of Scripture, to the mailing. The Chicago statement was written by leading evangelical theologians in 1978 and was cited by an SBC theological study committee under former SBC President H. Edwin Young.

The Chaplains Commission is composed of HMB directors and serves as the endorsing agency for the SBC. Chaplains are endorsed by the faith group they represent but paid by the organization they serve. The Chaplains Commission reports to the HMB board of directors, but the full board does not approve the endorsements.

Directors elected three new staff members including Donald A. Smith as associate director in the evangelism section. Smith presently serves on the evangelism staff of the Georgia Baptist Convention. Also elected were two staff in the church loans division. Joseph Pendas, a native of Louisiana, will serve as a loan manager, and Michael Rhine, of Ohio, as a loan officer.

Recognition was given to four staff who will retire this fall, including Bob Banks, executive vice president, operations. Banks, a native Georgian, has been in denominational service 43 years, 14 at the Home Mission Board, including one year as interim president of the agency prior to Lewis' election. Banks will retire Aug. 31 but will continue to assist the board in fund development through the end of the year.

Also honored were two secretarial staff members, Beverly Brattain and Helen Conley with 10 and 17 years' service respectively, and Bobby Sunderland, who served in the evangelism section 20 years.

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David Winfrey and Sarah Zimmerman contributed to this story.

**7,500 World Changers mark
highest participation ever**

By Susan Watt

**Baptist Press
8/10/95**

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Richard Tackett and his wife could not hear the sound of hammers on their roof. Neither could they hear the laughter and excitement of the 11 youth and adults who were replacing the roof and painting their house. Tackett and his wife are deaf and mute.

This summer, World Changers involved almost 7,500 youth and adults from 535 churches in 25 projects in the United States and Nicaragua sponsored by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission. This exceeds last summer's participation of 5,955. The theme for the summer, "We Make House Calls," was appropriate as almost 600 low-income or elderly residents received new roofs, fresh coats of paint, siding and other repairs on their homes.

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World Changers involves youth and adults in coeducational missions projects. Stressing "hands-on" involvement, participants learn about missions firsthand by becoming personally involved in meeting the needs of others.

The Tacketts' home was one of 20 renovated and repaired by World Changers crews in Pikeville, Ky., July 29-Aug. 5.

Neither of the Tacketts know standard sign language, and both are illiterate. However, communication did not seem to be a problem as Tackett pointed and gestured with his hands. Although he could not verbally express appreciation for the work World Changers was doing on his home, Tackett "spoke" volumes as he stood at the end of his driveway and pointed to his house, urging those driving by to stop and look.

"The experience of making a stranger's house into a real home is one I will never forget," said Amy Jones, 17, of South Norfolk Baptist Church, Chesapeake, Va. "To me, this is the ultimate gift of love."

In 1996, World Changers plans to host projects in 40 locations, including Kenya and Nicaragua. In addition to an increased number of "traditional" World Changers projects for senior high, junior high, collegiates and senior adults, expansion will include single adult and international projects and World Tour, a multi-faceted approach to missions experiences for youth combining inner-city ministries with light construction projects.

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Task force offering helps
for int'l student ministry

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
8/10/95

GATLINBURG, Tenn. (BP)--With approximately half a million foreign students and scholars now pursuing their educations at American colleges and universities, an interagency task force is calling for a "new movement" of ministry to international students.

"Southern Baptists need to be out there as the model for how to reach internationals," Brad Gray, a consultant for the Baptist Sunday School Board's national student ministry, said during a seminar at 1995 Student Week in Gatlinburg, Tenn. "If we are going to reach the world for Christ, we have to reach international students."

Gray is chairman of the International Student Ministry Interagency Committee, which includes representatives from the BSSB, Brotherhood Commission, Woman's Missionary Union, Foreign Mission Board and Home Mission Board. Also included is Nell Magee, director of student ministry for the New England Baptist Convention and a longtime participant and leader in Southern Baptist ministry to internationals.

During the student conference, the task force unveiled "Ministering to International Students," a new guide for churches and Baptist Student Unions involved or interested in international student ministry.

Three years in development, the 80-page guide was written by task force members and student ministers involved in international student ministry across the United States. It includes a Bible study, an outline and description of ongoing programs for ministering to internationals, tips for getting started and how to relate interculturally, a list of resources, ministry models from churches and BSUs and many other helps.

Gray said the manual, which can be obtained free of charge from the national student ministry office in Nashville, Tenn., will be updated periodically to include new resources and ministry tips.

The task force also is developing a certification program for people interested in additional training in international student ministry. The certification, expected to be offered in 1996, will include completing the manual, attending other workshops/seminars, examining other resources from SBC agencies and networking with others involved in international student work.

"We need to jump start international student ministry from where it is now," Gray said. "We are in a globalized era. Multiculturalism is the buzz word in our educational system. We have to give this priority."

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Speaking at the same seminar, Magee told students she has "literally traveled the world through the eyes of my international friends."

She said BSUs and churches can help internationals in a variety of ways, from adjusting to a new culture and language to sharing about values, morals and faith.

"Just be yourself and don't push your faith on them," she said. "Let them see you for who you are. Be natural and let God work through you."

The international student ministry guide may be obtained by writing to National Student Ministry, Baptist Sunday School Board, 127 Ninth Ave. N., Nashville, TN 37234 or calling (615) 251-2777.

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State's student strategy
could pay national dividends

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
8/10/95

ALEXANDRIA, La. (BP)--When friends ask Angie Arnold and Tish Budermer how they spent the summer of 95, they can answer in three words: "on the phone."

Arnold, a recent graduate of Louisiana College in Pineville, and Budermer, a senior at Louisiana Tech University in Ruston, called and wrote letters to hundreds of high school seniors across Louisiana as part of a statewide strategy designed to build relationships between high school and college students and increase awareness of Baptist Student Union.

According to Charles Skinner, director of promotion and discipleship in the Louisiana Baptist Convention's student ministry division, the strategy was developed in response to research conducted by his office four years ago which found more Baptists drop out of church during their junior and senior years of high school than at any other time of their lives.

"We realized if they drop out of church in high school, it would be much harder for us to interest them in BSU and local church involvement once they get on campus. We had to help strengthen their faith and their awareness of BSU before they lose interest," he said.

Skinner said he believes many high school students drop out of church "because they don't feel like they are being challenged like they are in school or in other areas of their lives. They start to get bored with it and feel like they've 'been there, done that.'"

The Louisiana strategy is designed to help high school students realize Christian discipleship is an ongoing process with constant challenges and opportunities for growth, he said.

The program, which has a four-pronged approach, works like this:

Each October, the state student ministry division sends out letters to all churches in the state asking for the names, addresses and telephone numbers of all high school seniors planning to go to college. In the summer, two full-time student workers operating out of the state convention office follow up by calling each student, asking which school they plan to attend and then informing them (both verbally and in writing) about the BSU on that particular campus. The information they collect about each high school student also is forwarded to the appropriate BSU director for additional follow-up.

"It's been very exciting (talking with the high school students) because I know what BSU has meant to me," said Arnold. "It's rewarding to know all these calls will result in more students getting involved in BSU."

The Louisiana student ministry division isn't receiving information from churches alone. It also gets names and addresses of high school students attending Centrifuge camps and other Baptist Sunday School Board-sponsored events for youth across the United States.

"We sort the names by state, keep ours and then forward the others on to the student ministry office in the appropriate state for follow-up. We're really becoming a national clearinghouse of student information," Skinner said.

The three other elements of the Louisiana strategy include:

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1) a special ministries team of six summer missionaries who travel across the state, singing and giving their testimonies before high school students at dozens of church worship services, youth camps, associational youth rallies, Sunday school classes and other locations.

2) a DiscipleNow team of 13 part-time summer missionaries who conduct weekend discipleship retreats with high school students in hundreds of homes across the state.

3) DiscipleNow retreats and other activities/events for high school students initiated by individual BSUs throughout the school year.

"It's not just a state focus; it's a local campus focus, too," Skinner explained. "Over half of our campuses are now using DiscipleNow as a strategy during the year to build relationships with high school students in their area. A number of campuses have "Crossover" committees or church relations committees designed to link BSU members with high school students in their area." Crossover is a Southern Baptist student ministry emphasis designed to assist high school students in their transition to college and career.

Is the strategy paying off? The answer is yes, according to Skinner, who points to three positive results:

1) Louisiana had the largest attendance ever at all of its state student events in 1994-95.

2) Louisiana had more students attending Mission 95, a nationwide missions conference held in Louisville, Ky., in December, than any other state.

3) The state office has received reports from campus directors across the state about how the strategy has brought "new life" and increased attendance to their programs.

Skinner said of the strategy: "It gets our college students in our local churches so they can see the good work that's going on there. And it helps high school students begin to see their faith as a growing thing that doesn't end when they go to college. And that growth can and should happen in both the BSU and a local church."

National Student Ministry consultant Scott Allen described Louisiana's efforts as an excellent example of the Crossover emphasis.

"What they're doing isn't a short-term program, it's a strategy that will have a long-term positive effect on BSU and church relations," he said. "With this approach, everybody wins."

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(BP) photo (horizontal) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the BSSB bureau of Baptist Press. Photo and outline also are available in the SBCNet News Room.

'Christy' cliffhanger
may never be resolved

By Jon Walker

Baptist Press
8/10/95

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--"Christy" fans shouldn't count on a conclusion to the show's season-ending cliffhanger. CBS didn't renew the series for next year so viewers may never know how Christy chooses between the two men pursuing her romantically: Cutter Gap's pastor, David Grantland, or doctor, Neil MacNeil.

The family oriented "Christy" is one of the few network television programs that develops the spiritual side of its characters, and its on-again-off-again presence on CBS has given its fans a roller-coaster test of loyalty.

The series' executive producer, Ken Wales, is asking for continued viewer loyalty, as reruns of the show shift to cable's Family Channel. "This is the way 'Christy' can come back," said Wales. "If we can transfer the audience of 7 million homes, minimum, that have been watching 'Christy' consistently each week, then we can convince The Family Channel and other networks the audience is still there, loyal and faithful."

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Wales is confident with such a showing, The Family Channel or CBS will renew the series. He urged Christian families not to be afraid of subscribing to cable to support "Christy." Despite the plethora of coarse programming on cable, Wales noted there are many good channels available, including The Family Channel, Nickelodeon, A&E, The History Channel and Disney.

This is a "real test case," he said, showing whether people concerned about family oriented television will follow "Christy" to cable. "Christy" reruns start on The Family Channel on Oct. 7 at 7 p.m. Eastern time.

In the meantime, Broadman & Holman is releasing a second "Christy" video, the Thanksgiving episode that paved the way for the program's return to CBS last year. Harold King, with Broadman & Holman, said the "Christy" videos are selling well, the first one with sales of more than 200,000.

Ironically, "Christy" has won critical acclaim during its short network run, as well as drawing 44 million viewers for its pilot episode and a respectable audience for its weekly shows. Reportedly, CBS received more positive cards, letters and phone calls for "Christy" than any other program in the network's history.

But the show's audience is missing the coveted 18-49 male demographics perceived as necessary by many advertisers. Wales isn't sure how the sale of CBS to Westinghouse may influence the chances of "Christy" returning to the network. For now, he said, "They have new sitcoms coming on that they need to make room for, and I don't think all of those are going to succeed. There's a chance, because of 'Christy's proven track record, that we can come back (to fill one of those slots)."

Wales said it's not too late to write CBS, requesting the return of "Christy." Viewers wishing to do so should write: Mr. Leslie Moonves, President, CBS Entertainment, 7800 Beverly Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90036. The phone number is (213) 852-2345.

"I think 'Christy' has a tremendous future, even if we have to do some recasting (because of this delay)," Wales said. "Kellie Martin may go back to Yale, but the story of 'Christy' is the most important thing. It has a character whose spiritual life is at the center of what she does, and that's remarkable."

Wales, the son of a Methodist minister, labored 18 years to get "Christy" on the screen.

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Students challenged to reclaim
biblical morality on campus

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
8/10/95

GATLINBURG, Tenn. (BP)--There's a tug-of-war taking place in American society between absolute truth and moral relativism, and too often the latter is winning.

That's what more than 700 college students and their leaders attending 1995 Student Week Aug. 5-10 learned before being challenged to "reclaim the higher ground" of morality on their campuses.

"There are some real problems in our society today, some cracks in the foundation and my generation let them form," Sam Douglass, pastor of Yorktown Baptist Church, Corpus Christi, Texas, said during a morning Bible study at the meeting, which was held at the Gatlinburg (Tenn.) Conference Center. "My challenge to you as a new generation is to reclaim the high ground because my generation gave it away."

The theme for the conference, tied in closely to Josh McDowell's "Right from Wrong" campaign, was "Absolutes? Absolutely!" It was designed to point students to the absolute truth of God's Word.

The basic struggle society faces, Douglass said, is choosing between two models of truth. The first, a theocentric (God-centered) model, says truth is defined by God for everyone; it is objective and absolute. The second is anthropocentric (man-centered), and says truth is defined by the individual; it is subjective and situational.

Douglass told students they will find peers on their campuses who live according to all kinds of standards, from "if it feels good do it" to "the latest thing they've seen on TV."

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"A whole generation of people are grasping at straws, looking for truth in pagan deities, Eastern religions and crystals," he said, pointing out 126 new cults formed last year in California alone.

But absolute truth, he said, is "that which is for all people, for all time, for all places. ... God himself is the standard."

But "openness" and "tolerance" are the cardinal virtues in education today, Lamar Cooper, director of denominational relations for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said in a seminar on "Making Moral Choices." Students are taught to fear anyone who teaches or says they have absolute truth, he said, adding "they are considered to be a danger."

The problem, Cooper said, came when society began placing human reason above divine revelation.

To determine right from wrong in an increasingly complex world, Cooper said Christians must learn to develop spiritual discernment. Four things are necessary: personal salvation through faith in Christ, leadership of the Holy Spirit, knowledge of the Word of God and putting that knowledge into action.

Students met in discussion groups throughout the week to discuss how they can confront moral relativism on their campuses and in their own lives. Drawn from the new collegiate workbook, "Out of the Moral Maze," compiled by McDowell, they learned to "consider the four C's" when determining right and wrong:

- Consider the choice;
- Compare it to God;
- Commit to his way;
- Count on his protection and provision.

Speaking during an evening worship celebration, Rene Rochester told students the best defense against moral relativism is knowledge of the Word of God.

"The problem in the church today is that we're not hiding the Word of God in our heart," Rochester, women's director of Kids Across America Ministries, said. "I don't read God's Word because it's the right thing to do; I read it because I'm in love with the author. I want to read the love letters he wrote to me."

In a session with student ministers, Rochester said God is looking for leaders with a "shepherd's heart."

"You can't lead someone where you yourself can't go. Your public ministry will be no more powerful than your time alone with God."

Dan Yeary, pastor of North Phoenix Baptist Church, Phoenix, Ariz., told students the "ultimate absolute" of the Christian faith is the Great Commission.

"It gives us direction to who we are and what we do in our lives. It is the purpose of the church and every individual believer," he said.

The question every Christian must ask, Yeary said, is, "Will we share what we have?"

"Some people are spiritual sponges. They absorb all this stuff and never share it by squeezing themselves out. ... Are you going to sit and soak or are you going to go and give?" he asked.

Student Week was sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board's national student ministry.

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**Arts can enhance worship
when they glorify God**

By Linda Lawson

**Baptist Press
8/10/95**

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--When art, drama and music are used to glorify God, they strengthen worship, but according to a drama/worship expert: The moment they begin to glorify the artist or the art form, they detract from the worship of God and no longer belong in the church.

"The more we glorify the artist or the art form, we will be caught in the cycle of worldliness," Matt Tullos, drama and worship consultant told participants in a conference during the Aug. 5-11 Bibl preaching-church growth leadership conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

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"Great symphonies and great art started out in the church. Every art form started out as a religious medium," Tullos said, noting drama first was used in churches about 970 A.D. when the scene at the empty tomb was re-enacted in connection with Easter.

Due to its popularity, drama moved from inside the church walls to church yards where many dramatic biblical stories such as Adam and Eve, Noah and David and Goliath were re-enacted on multiple stages. To enable the audience to remain in one place, dramas then were placed on movable or pageant wagons.

While continuing for a time to enact biblical scenes, the dramas gradually became more secular in nature and less religious.

"As they began to glorify the artists rather than glorifying God, drama moved out of the church," he said.

Noting many churches today are increasingly making effective use of drama and other art forms in worship, he said, "I have a hope that the arts will once again find a home in the church."

Drama in worship glorifies God when it is an "ensemble effort and not an emphasis on personalities within the drama or worship team," Tullos said in an interview. It is effective when it is "unified and focused on the central message."

A strength of drama in worship, Tullos said, is that it can be used effectively to appeal to the five senses, enhancing the impact of worship.

For example, "the Lord's Supper is very dramatic and touches all senses" -- taste, smell, touch, hearing and seeing -- he said. He challenged worship planners to evaluate their worship services and, as a beginning, seek to include movement and all five senses in worship in a one-month period.

Tullos cited the life and ministry of Jesus as a continuing illustration of the use of drama. He told stories. He healed a blind man by mixing mud and placing it over his eyes. He used well water to tell a woman about living water.

He cautioned drama should be introduced gradually into worship services where it has not been used before. Church members should be educated on its values, both to enhance the worship experience of Christians and to reach others who would be more attracted initially by drama than more traditional worship forms.

Regardless of the style of worship, careful planning and coordination is vital, Tullos said.

In churches today, the topic of the sermon may not be addressed in any other parts of the service -- drama, music, announcements or visuals. The language of the invitation may be identical every Sunday.

He suggested worship be planned by a team -- pastor, minister of music, drama coordinator. "The best way to plan worship is for key people to sculpt out the service."

Every element should support and build on the theme.

When comedy is used, its purpose should not be to make people laugh but to communicate the message, Tullos said. If the focus is on emotions, the purpose should be not to create a "cathartic moment" but to "drive home the message of the worship service."

Depending on the theme, he suggested broadening the invitation occasionally. In addition to inviting people to make professions of faith, rededicate their lives to Christ or respond to God's call to ministry, the invitation might also invite people to lay aside bitterness in their hearts.

In the use of drama, "we're going to a team orientation in what we do. Drama in worship is a strong, lay-led, grassroots movement."

To be most effective, Tullos said worship should be "interactive with a multi-dimensional flavor."

Tullos will coordinate a national conference on drama and worship April 18-20, 1996, at the Baptist Sunday School Board's Church Program Training Center. The keynote speaker will be Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago. More information about the conference is available by writing the Church Program Training Center, Mail Stop 148, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, TN 37234; phone (615) 251-2294.

Church's media library
should be a family place

By Linda Lawson

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Church media librarians were challenged to open their hearts and their libraries to preschoolers and, in the process, help young children develop positive attitudes about church and God.

"It would be great if the library were the friendliest place in the church," said Morlee Maynard, ministry/systems coordinator specialist in the Baptist Sunday School Board's church growth group.

She and Cindy Lumkin, design editor of preschool Sunday school materials, led sessions on media and preschoolers during Aug. 4-11 media library conferences at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

Ministering to preschoolers is the 1995-96 focus for Southern Baptist media library ministry.

Maynard urged librarians to demonstrate they value preschoolers by broadening their understanding of preschoolers' common characteristics, including being imaginative, creative, active and sensitive.

"They wear their feelings on their sleeves even if they're bullies," Maynard said.

Also, she noted, preschoolers are imitators. "If you want them to sit in chairs in the library and not on tables, adults need to sit in chairs."

Preschoolers also are literal-minded and do not learn how to separate fantasy from reality until about the fifth grade. Therefore, realistic art is preferable to cartoons, especially in books with religious themes, said Maynard.

In selecting media for preschoolers, she said librarians should evaluate on the basis of truth and biblical accuracy, age appropriateness and attractiveness of the art and color.

In addition to valuing preschoolers, Maynard also cited the importance of media librarians accepting preschoolers "just the way they are. And they are active, noisy and obnoxious sometimes.

"When children come to your library, there may be some things going on (in their lives) you don't know about," she said.

In addition, Maynard challenged media librarians to see themselves as partners with parents and teachers of preschoolers.

"The teachers and parents have battle fatigue. You can help by letting them know of helpful resources they can check out," she said.

She suggested cultivating relationships with parents and teachers by sending birthday cards, listening and sharing helpful information.

"You may have the best library in the world, but if they don't know you, chances are they won't come," Maynard said.

With preschool workers, Lumkin suggested media librarians collect used Sunday school, discipleship training and missions resource kits and place items in a vertical file for future use. Also, she said librarians can assist preschool workers by helping them catalog their books and tapes and help them repair books.

"There are a lot of things you can do to help preschool workers be better trained and equipped," Lumkin said.

Finally, Maynard urged, make the library a "family place."

"Sometimes the family needs to come to church together and stay together. The library could be that place," Maynard observed.

"You have the resources. You have the place where parents could sit on the floor and read a book to their children."

Lumkin suggested librarians place a blanket in a corner of the library with simple toys where a toddler can play while his parents are using the library.

Children need to feel the library is a "safe place where they know they won't get chewed out," Maynard said.

At church, all adults in some way "are teachers of preschoolers and we need to take that role pretty seriously," she said.

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The conferences were sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board's church media library program.

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A list of books for parents and teachers of preschoolers is posted in the SBCNet News Room. Filename is books.txt.

Pro athlete-turned-businessman
recounts God's call to service

By Kelli Williams

Baptist Press
8/10/95

RALEIGH, N.C. (BP)--Once a professional football player with the Cleveland Browns and in the Canadian Football League, then a successful commercial real estate broker, Johnny Evans knew all about the work world and was happy in his job.

Then he began to feel the Lord's call.

It happened slowly at first -- just a tug at his heart and his mind here and there. Then, in a rush of God's timing, it all came together in less than two months. Now Evans is director for the Triangle Fellowship of Christian Athletes in Raleigh, N.C., area. He serves 14 counties and helps coordinate more than 50 ministry "huddle" groups of middle school, high school and college students as well as adult coaches and other athletes.

It all began when he served as chairman of the Franklin Graham Crusade in Raleigh last September. In early 1993, Evans and other crusade volunteers began meeting to pray and organize the event which drew in more than 55,000 people to hear the gospel.

"As the date for the crusade got closer and closer, my volunteer chairman position became a 40-hour-a-week job. I was torn. I would go home after a day's work having spent eight or 10 hours on crusade business and maybe an hour or two on real estate business. I prayed, 'Lord, I've been blessed. I feel fulfilled and satisfied working for the crusade, but I didn't do anything to make a living today.'"

Evans' real estate business still prospered, but he began to have a quiet feeling the Lord was laying a foundation for him to consider full-time ministry. "I had no idea what that ministry would be," he said, "and I had no predisposition about how it would work."

In addition to his work with the crusade, Evans also was active as the local FCA board chairman. The ministry always had been close to his heart since he came to know Christ at an FCA conference as a 16-year-old high school football player. All through college and into his professional career with the Cleveland Browns and the Canadian Football League, he continued to work in lay ministry with FCA. Then, right after the Franklin Graham crusade ended -- in what Evans calls "divine timing" -- the FCA's Triangle area director resigned.

Evans and other board members met to discuss who the replacement would be. "One of the men on the committee said to me, 'Johnny, you really need to be praying about this.' I said, 'Well, I am praying about this. That's why we're here together -- to pray about a replacement director.' He said, 'No, you really need to consider this position.' I took that with much skepticism and thought to myself, 'No, I don't see how that would work.' But on the other hand, I remembered how my spirit had been moved while working with the crusade. So I said, 'OK, I will pray about this and talk it over with my wife.'"

How did Evans know the Lord wanted him to leave his full-time job and serve with FCA? "There weren't any lights or anything," he recounted. "It was a combination of little things. One Scripture verse really spoke to me personally -- 2 Timothy 1:6. It is Paul's admonition to Timothy to fan into flame the gift that God had given him. I felt the Lord was saying to me, 'Johnny, I've shown you that I want you to fan into flame your gifts -- use them to really focus on my kingdom and my work.'"

So, after repeated confirmation in the lessons of his Bible study fellowship group and the full support of his wife, on Dec. 1, 1994, Evans became the new FCA Triangle area director.

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"I've been involved in ministry throughout my adult life, but I was still a little anxious," he recalled. "So I just prayed, 'Lord, I'm going to cling to you. I've gotten a clear calling, confirmation from Christian friends, my wife, the Scriptures and prayer. The timing is right, so I'm going to take this step of faith."

Nine months later, Evans is busy communicating with huddle leaders, making sure they are prepared to begin their "mission to the school system" this fall. He provides training and resources for all 14 counties in the large Triangle area. He also owns a small commercial real estate business, but his primary focus is FCA.

How does a person know when God is calling in a new direction? According to Evans, before anything else ask, "Am I running from something and using this new idea as an excuse or is this really a calling? Am I considering it as an afterthought -- a way to alleviate a job, career, family or geographical situation? If it does provide some relief from a bad situation, that's great, but be sure God really is calling and motivating you."

Evans listed four "lighthouses" he observe -- "Pray;" "Seek" God's word in th Scriptures; "Go" to respected Christians for wise counsel; and "Look" with open eyes on the circumstances.

"You need to make sure you mix all four of these together," he said. "You can't take one or two and say, 'Oh there's an open door, the job's available. That must be God -- I'm going to do it' before you have even prayed about it and sought Scripture or wise counsel. You need to mesh them together over time -- his time. For me, it seemed like a short period -- the two months I considered the FCA job. For a lot of people, that's a quick time line, but really he was working in my heart for 18 months before that as I prepared for the crusade."

From his personal experience, Evans said he knows the call of God on a person -- whether in his or her career or another area -- can seem like a big step. But the benefits of taking the time to follow his direction are immeasurable, he said. "Anytime we take a step of faith, there's always a bit of the unknown, but th re's also an excitement to that as well. There is something really exciting knowing you're in God's will and then taking those steps of faith."

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EDITORS' NOTE: A Baptist Press story during the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in June included the wrong goal for the 1996 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions. The June 19 (BP) story, "WMU executive board approves budget, sets 1998 NAC dates," incorrectly said the 1996 Annie Armstrong goal is \$50 million. The 1996 goal is actually \$42 million. The \$50 million goal approved by the WMU executive board is for 1997.

The annual home missions offering provides approximately 50 percent of the budget for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. The board currently supports 4,913 missionaries.

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