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NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee

901 Commerce #750

Nashville, Tennessee 37203

(615) 244-2355

Herb Hollinger, Vice President

Fax (615) 742-8919

CompuServe ID# 70420,17

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522, CompuServe 70420,250

DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232, CompuServe 70420,115

NASHVILLE Linda Lawson, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300, CompuServe 70420,57

RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151, CompuServe 70420,72

WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223, CompuServe 71173,316

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WRAP-UP

Midwestern trustees elect
4 vice presidents, 2 faculty

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
10/18/95

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Trustees of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, enthusiastically responding to new President Mark T. Coppenger's leadership, elected four vice presidents and two new faculty members and approved a host of other items as they met for their semiannual meeting, Oct. 16-17, in Kansas City, Mo.

The 35-member board elected Lamar Cooper vice president for academic affairs, Martin F. King as vice president for institutional advancement, Gary K. Ledbetter as vice president for student development and Michael Whitehead as vice president for business affairs. Cooper also was elected dean of the faculty and professor of Old Testament and Hebrew.

A new position, assistant professor of spiritual formation "to enhance the spiritual formation of students, faculty and all seminary families," was created at the request of Coppenger. Trustees elected an Illinois pastor to the new post, Donald S. Whitney, pastor of Glenfield Baptist Church in a Chicago suburb, Glen Ellyn.

Whitney, 41, is a native of Memphis, Tenn., and has been pastor at Glenfield for 14 years. He has a bachelor's degree from Arkansas State University, Jonesboro; a master of divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas; and a doctor of ministry from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Ill. In addition to Glenfield, Whitney also was a pastor in Arkadelphia, Ark., and Irving, Texas.

In recommending Whitney to the trustees, Coppenger said his "identification with the conservative direction of our convention and his Midwest church and mission experience, in my judgment, make him the standout we need He is a widely celebrated and published scholar and practitioner in the spiritual disciplines"

Also, a visiting professor of missions, Ronald D. Rogers, on leave from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, was elected associate professor of missions. Rogers, 44, a native of Gadsden, Ala., has been a missionary to Brazil since 1987. He is a graduate of Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, Tenn., and has master and doctoral degrees from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, Memphis, Tenn.

Rogers also was a pastor in Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee and South Carolina. In Brazil, he was a professor of theology at the Baptist theological seminary in Goias.

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It was in presenting his first administrative team, the four vice presidents, that Coppenger, who became president Aug. 1 following nearly five years as a vice president for the SBC Executive Committee, gave the trustees an insight into his direction for the seminary. All four are considered conservative leaders, actively involved in the "conservative resurgence" of the Southern Baptist Convention, as Coppenger has been.

Coppenger said some had called the four "a dream or power team." Since coming to Kansas City, the new president has often articulated his vision of the seminary with a strong, conservative staff and faculty reaching out to the nation's Midwest in an evangelistic, missionary and revival spirit, called "prairie fire."

Cooper, 53, has been director of denominational relations for the SBC Christian Life Commission since 1989, following nine years as dean of graduate studies for Criswell College, Dallas. A native of New Orleans, Cooper has degrees from Louisiana College, Pineville, and two degrees from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

King, 44, is the public relations and development officer for the SBC Home Mission Board. An Indiana native, King has a bachelor's degree from Indiana State University, Terre Haute, and has completed course work for a master's degree in journalism from Ball State University, Muncie, Ind.

Ledbetter, 40, is the editor of the Indiana Baptist, newsjournal of that state convention, and the convention's director of student work. A native of Arkansas, Ledbetter is a graduate of Criswell College and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is chairman of the SBC Christian Life Commission and a member of the SBC Committee on Order of Business.

Whitehead, 45, is the general counsel and director of Christian citizenship and religious liberty concerns for the SBC Christian Life Commission. A native of the Kansas City area, Whitehead has a bachelor's degree and a juris doctor from the University of Missouri, Columbia. An attorney, Whitehead also was responsible for general legal work of the CLC.

All four vice presidential positions had been vacant, with interim leadership, although the student development post actually combined two previous positions, dean of students and vocational services.

In other action, trustees voted to postpone the seminary's plans to build a Family Life Ministry Center on campus. The action will give the new administration and trustees time to look at the \$700,000 center in light of the seminary's overall plans, officials said. Although approved by the trustees last year, difficulties had developed in the loan process even though blueprints had been completed for the structure.

In a related action, trustees approved a three-member trustee committee to name four persons to board vacancies for the Seminary Housing Corporation, a subsidiary of the seminary which develops and operates student housing on campus. The proposed Family Life Ministry Center was to be built by the housing corporation, which has an eight-member board of directors. The four new directors will need to be approved by the full trustee board at its April meeting.

Trustees also filled a vacancy on their own board, electing Mike Green, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Republic, Mo., to fill the position vacated by Elaine Hardy, Stilwell, Kan. Green will serve until the SBC annual meeting in June 1996, when the SBC will formally elect someone to fill the remaining years of Hardy's term, through mid-1999.

In a resolution, trustees voted to ask the SBC Woman's Missionary Union to "back away" from its decision in July to publish missions materials for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The resolution, brought by chairman Lewis Adkison, a Colorado Springs, Colo., pastor, requests the WMU to "once again ... identify with the heart of Southern Baptist missionary work and thereby secure the trust of the grass roots churches of the Convention." The resolution expressed "deep regret" and "disappointment" in the decision by the "WMU leadership to give increasingly open support to those who criticize and oppose our SBC work." The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is a new organization of Baptists critical of SBC leadership.

Trustees also approved a new faculty questionnaire which will be given to all prospective faculty. It includes questions about the person's support of the Baptist Faith and Message, the seminary's basic theological document, as well as whether the candidate can support the SBC's position in opposition to abortion, exclusion of churches actively supporting homosexual behavior and opposition to women's ordination and women as pastors.

Also, trustees heard the "first reading" of a new faculty tenure policy, to be voted on at the April meeting in accordance with bylaw requirements. A 1993 dispute over tenure with a faculty member resulted in four "notations" by the Association of Theological Schools, one of the seminary's accrediting agencies.

Coppenger held a discussion with trustees regarding a response to the ATS notations, required by Nov. 1. Coppenger said the seminary would respond to the agency's concerns and "perhaps register several concerns of our own" about ATS. The trustees will ask the ATS to "recognize the substance" of their reply and to "affirm" the seminary.

Acknowledging the growth of the denomination's Cooperative Program and a positive outlook for the seminary's enrollment growth, trustees approved a revised 1995-96 budget. The new budget calls for \$3,913,536 in revenue and \$3,890,159 in expenses. That budget compares to the 1994-95 budget of \$3,722,553 and 1993-94 of \$3,528,525.

Coppenger noted the seminary's financial health and asked for a number of projects to be financed by increased revenue from several sources. Among a number of approvals, trustees okayed new siding and other exterior repair to the president's house, campus building repairs and a new van from previously unspent capital needs funds; setting aside \$318,789 in an operating reserve and \$12,000 for Christmas bonuses for 120 employees from unused endowment-generated interest income; \$75,000 from new SBC capital needs funds for library automation; \$120,500 from an undesignated land sale (fountain) fund for budgeted but uncovered president emeritus expenses; and about \$60,000 in extra SBC CP allocations to upgrade budgets for the four new vice presidents.

Trustees spent about an hour behind closed doors discussing a matter dealing with a contract teacher who wrote an article in a magazine which apparently offended the seminary community, including trustees. They voted to express their concern and ask the new administration not to disburse funds for severance pay without the board's approval, or until a "standard faculty contract" is in place.

The contract teacher, David Thompson, was fired by acting academic vice president John Howell. He was paid for the class he was to teach in the summer but not for expenses he had claimed. His article appeared in "The Door," an irreverent publication which often takes a satirical look at religious life.

Trustees also heard initial enrollment figures for 1995 were up over last year. The current total enrollment, according to the office of the registrar, is 484, compared to 431 last year and 495 in 1993.

In other action, trustees were told preparations for the inauguration of President Coppenger in April 1996 are being implemented; participated with faculty and staff in a weekend retreat before the trustees' meeting; and directed the administration to tighten enforcement of policies regarding tuition payments and student loans not being paid on time.

Also, the trustee board approved a study of its own bylaws, with the possibility of adding permanent student affairs and personnel committees to the trustee structure. The board also asked the administration to study the current 20 cents per mile travel allowance policy, noting the Internal Revenue Service allows 30 cents.

Trustees participated in a "Presidential Recognition Dinner," Oct. 15, for former president Milton Ferguson. Ferguson, emeritus president, led the seminary from 1973 until his retirement last year.

**Million Man March may undercut
evangelism efforts, Baptists say** By David Winfrey

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)--The Million Man March may have united African American men around positive issues, but it also could bolster the Nation of Islam in African American communities and hurt Christian evangelism efforts there, some Southern Baptist leaders said.

The Oct. 16 march, organized by Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, drew an estimated 400,000 African American men to the nation's capital, according to the U.S. Parks Service's estimate.

Amid religious references and themes, participants and speakers affirmed the event as a time of atonement and black unity. Some African American Christians supported the march, emphasizing the issues being addressed over the event's main personality.

"Here's someone I often disagree with, someone I may not even like. But if the guy says, 'Let's put water on the fire,' I'm going to help. The message obscures the messenger," Joseph Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was quoted by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution as saying.

But E.W. McCall, president of the African American Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention, said he didn't support the march because the message was inseparable from Farrakhan. "I would never line up Christ under Allah," said McCall, a California pastor. "There are some things I will not sell out to for any social contribution."

"We have almost no common ground with the Nation of Islam," Henry Lyons, president of the National Baptist Convention U.S.A., the nation's largest African American Baptist denomination, was quoted as saying in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "The preaching of hate, we do not hold with that," said Lyons, a St. Petersburg, Fla., pastor.

Willie McPherson, director of the Home Mission Board's black church extension division, lauded the goal to instill pride in young black men. "But Louis Farrakhan is the wrong person for Christians to rally around," he said.

The march will likely increase the Nation of Islam's influence among young black men because Farrakhan addresses issues important to them, said McPherson, who is African American.

"There are a lot of people, possibly immature Christians, who don't see anything wrong with Farrakhan," he said. "I think it will make it more difficult for people who are wanting to develop people as true, serious followers of Jesus Christ to impact the African American community."

People newly attracted to Farrakhan may now see the Christian church as "the white man's religion," he said. "Evangelizing will become somewhat more difficult than it already is."

Phil Roberts, director of the HMB's interfaith witness department, said the march gives unprecedented influence to the Nation of Islam. "I think it's going to make it harder for black churches to do their job and it's going to perhaps even maliciously or insidiously lead along some people down the path of total segregation and racial conflict."

Early next year, the board will release a training manual and video to educate Christians about the Nation of Islam, McPherson said.

The Nation of Islam is considered an Islamic cult and is not recognized as orthodox by other Muslims.

Each issue of the Nation of Islam's paper, The Final Call, includes a list of their beliefs, Roberts said. Among those are a call for America's government to set aside a separate territory for blacks in America and 20 years of financial support for this new state. "He's calling for racial segregation and he is basically seeking to create a new nation."

Roberts called it ironic that someone seeking total separation would use a similar forum as Martin Luther King Jr., who 32 years ago called for total integration.

McPherson added Christians must tackle the same issues, such as race relations, addressed by Farrakhan.

"That's a Christian responsibility and Louis Farrakhan is able to do the things he does because all Christians are not together standing up against what is wrong in our nation," he said. "Why is it that Louis Farrakhan, who is a racist, can pull together people -- Christian and non-Christian -- in support of something that he does?"

A Washington Post-ABC News poll reported about 84 percent of blacks surveyed said the march was a good idea, although nearly half expressed a negative impression of Farrakhan.

McCall cautioned against giving too much credence to Farrakhan. "He does not have a lot of following," he said. "The message of Christ is as sound as it ever has been and, if we can articulate the message of Christ within our own culture and needs, I think it will always go ahead of the Nation of Islam."

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FMB missionary dies
in bout with malaria

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GAGNOA, Ivory Coast (BP)--A 32-year-old Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board missionary died Oct. 14 at her home in Gagnoa, Ivory Coast, during a bout with malaria.

The missionary, Holly Larm, of Highland, Mich., was appointed to work in the West African nation in 1992 with her husband, Allen. The couple had just completed local language learning requirements. She was assigned to a church and home ministry.

"We're grieved over Holly's tragic death," said FMB President Jerry Rankin. "This is a reminder to Southern Baptists that we must not be negligent in praying for our missionaries as they serve in places of danger and risk where health and safety can't be taken for granted."

Board officials hope Ivory Coast officials will release Larm's body in time to schedule funeral services in Michigan early in the week of Oct. 22. The family has already arrived back in Michigan.

Larm was born July 7, 1963, in Livonia, Mich. Besides her husband, she is survived by two children, Amber, 9, and Luke, 7, and her parents, William Munce of Highland, Mich., and Marsha Munce of Novi, Mich.

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ANALYSIS

Is television responsible
for America's drug problem?

By C.C. Risenhoover

Baptist Press
10/18/95

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Some people think television is the reason why America, with only 2 percent of the world's population, consumes 65 percent of the world's supply of hard drugs.

Other people refuse to accept such an easy explanation, but even they have difficulty denying that TV sells addiction and is itself addictive.

Those who choose to use drugs can give no better, or more sensible, reason as to why they have chosen to spend all or part of their lives stupefied. They can, of course, blame their addiction on the pain and despair in the world -- or the boredom and need for magic or pleasure in a society empty of both. They can, and most often do, always fault somebody else for their addiction.

So why not blame television? Television, like drugs, dominates the lives of its addicts. TV promises drug addicts all the pleasures they say life denies them. In fact, the drug plague coincides with the unspoken assumption of most television shows, which is that life should be easy.

Such TV shows contradict the teaching of Jesus, who taught joy in living but did not promise believers an easy life.

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Nobody seems to work on TV except cops, doctors and lawyers. Complicated events are summarized in a minute or less on TV news. Commercials tell viewers that if they drink the right beer they will be exuberant and happy. So why should real life be such a grind?

Surveys show the average American family is watching television more than seven hours a day. That sort of time commitment to a passive activity is beyond the realm of common sense. No society in history has ever spent that much of its time being entertained. One does not have to be a rocket scientist to understand that such a pervasive diet of instant imagery changes people in profound ways. And rarely for the better.

If people spend one or two hours a week in church and 49 hours in front of a TV set, which do you think is going to have the most influence on them?

As an example of TV's effect on people, especially children, a university study gave a group of 4- and 5-year-olds the choice of giving up television or giving up their fathers. More than one-third said they would give up daddy.

For those shocked by the response of more than one-third of the children, think about what the response would be if kids and parents were given the choice of giving up TV or church.

These were just kids, of course, but their attitude pretty much coincides with that of every junkie in the world. The need for cocaine or heroin will cause a junkie to give up father, mother, sister, brother, wife, husband, children or job.

TV and hard drugs have paralleled each other during the more than 40 years in which they have festered into full-fledged sores on the American landscape. Simply put, drugs, TV and two generations of Americans grew up together during that period.

In the 1940s and '50s TV was in its infancy and drugs were more a rumor than the nightmare they are today. Drugs were not a major problem. But then, neither was TV.

Until the early '60s, hard drugs were still marginal to life in America. So was TV.

There were about 32 million TV sets in the country in 1955. Now there are more than 200 million TV sets and hard drugs are no longer marginal. They make up a \$150 billion annual market.

What has happened is that two generations of Americans have grown up with television from their earliest moments of consciousness. They have embraced it, been diverted by it, been formed by it and are in love with it. Drug addiction has afflicted these same generations.

The drug problem is not cyclical. It is here and thriving because of cultural changes that encourage addictive patterns in society. One of those primary "changes" is television, which has been the most important, most prominent cultural element in American society over the past four decades. Television is, arguably, the best seller of addiction the world has ever known.

That is because television has provided advertising the type of soapbox and audience access necessary to really become creative in the selling of addiction.

It should also be mentioned that advertising and the media grew up together. Media, especially TV, instead of being an innocent and noble reporter, are a co-participant in society's addiction. The media does not, will not, bite the hand that feeds it. And, advertising feeds it very well.

Excessive TV viewing makes a person asocial, just as a drug addict is asocial. TV devotees tend to become alienated and isolated from the outside world. The same can be said about drugs.

Mind-altering drugs tamper with an individual's moods. So does TV. It is a consciousness-altering medium that takes a person out of the real world. Changing channels can alter mood with nothing more than music or a laugh track. TV can cause an individual to laugh, be frightened, feel tension, be excited or feel sober.

These mood shifts are as easily attained as taking a pill.

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Television viewing is passive, whereas reading is active. Reading is an act of imagination because the reader must decode symbols called words and create images or ideas and make them connect. The reader, being active, works at his or her own pace. The TV viewer, being passive, proceeds at the pace determined by the program. TV never demands its audience take part in an act of imagination. No decoding is necessary and no thinking is required before the next set of images and spoken words mummify the brain.

Television's addictive qualities are more complicated than the structure of its simplistic dramas, which have been pounded into the American subconscious the past 40-plus years. TV's addictive qualities are more complicated than the beer commercials that promise "happily ever after," if a person drinks the right brand.

The important thing to understand is that television's addictive qualities can be controlled. It is important to teach kids to say "no" to television, just as they are taught to say "no" to drugs. It requires that a parent take control of the set, that a parent teach children to watch specific programs.

Parents also should be more careful what they watch, setting the proper example.

Children learn quickly. If a child is constantly exposed to cute 30- and 60-second beer commercials, chances are pretty good he or she will attribute fun and good times to drinking. So parents need to explain to the child how advertising is trying to manipulate her or him. If a parent allows his or her child, or children, to watch TV, there is also a responsibility for continuing education on the part of the parent.

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Seminarians serve lunch
with an international flare

By Dwayne Hastings

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WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's Ledford Center had a new flavor Oct. 13. Instead of the familiar aroma of french fries and hamburgers sizzling on the snackbar grill, the pungent scent of Korean dishes punctuated the air in the student center.

For the third year in a row, the Korean Students Fellowship shared their native cuisine with the curious Southeastern family in the event billed as a World Festival at the Wake Forest, N.C., campus.

"We hope that by gathering together, that we would draw for everyone an increased awareness of the worldwide mission of our Christian faith," said Nansook Street, who organized the free luncheon. Students from 17 foreign countries attend Southeastern.

Street, who is from Suwon, South Korea, said home missions work among ethnic groups is imperative in the culture-rich United States, as well as the task of reaching around the world with the gospel, adding, "This is the task that Jesus has commanded for all of us."

The luncheon attracted faculty and students alike. Southeastern President Paige Patterson and his family were among those who took a liking to the food and the occasion itself.

"The presence of international students at Southeastern accomplishes several things," Patterson said. "Primarily, it keeps the face of international missions in front of our students every day.

"It is the only way I know to bring the kind of worldwide diversity in the student body that creates perpetual learning situations day by day," Patterson continued. "There are many students who may have never met a person from another culture, but now they are living, studying and worshiping alongside brothers and sisters in Christ from around the globe. It's a valuable learning experience we can't create in the classroom."

Street said the event also was designed to build friendships among the international and American students. "Many of these students have left their homeland to study here," he explained. "During the weekends and holidays, I know they have lonesome and homesick feelings so we wanted to encourage friendship among the international students and their American friends."

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The event's menu included kim chee, a spicy cabbage dish; jab chae, starch noodles with vegetables and beef; pok um bab, fried rice; man doo, beef and vegetables wrapped in fried dough; pool go ghee, marinated beef; and kim pop, sushi roll with beef and rice wrapped in seaweed.

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Former race car owners
now in fast lane ministry

By Holly Smith

Baptist Press
10/18/95

MADERA, Calif. (BP)--Ask Ron and Chris Spencer why they got involved in racetrack chaplaincy and both will respond, "God made us" do it.

"It was like we were compelled to tell these people and to show them that God works miracles and changes lives," Chris Spencer said.

At one time the couple co-owned a race car and were involved in racing at Madera Speedway in central California. But the deaths of several friends in racing accidents caused Chris and Ron to reconsider their role in racing.

"We were pretty new Christians at that time and the impact of being a new Christian and wondering where these guys were going (when they died) was pretty scary," Chris said.

So five years ago, with help from fellow Christian and racetrack promoter Ken Coventry, the Spencers began a chaplaincy ministry at Madera Speedway. It was the first such ministry for both the Spencers and the raceway.

Ron had been involved with drugs and alcohol for 20 years and was seeing a psychiatrist for other problems in 1987 when "God took (the dependency) away -- no counseling, God just took it."

"It was a major transition," Chris added. "We realized God was telling us something in a big way. It was the beginning of a new life."

In August 1988 Ron and Chris were baptized at First Southern Baptist Church in Fresno, where they remain active members. Ron, who was licensed to the gospel ministry by First Southern in August 1992, serves as chairman of the church's properties committee. Chris serves on the church's personnel committee and teaches Girls in Action.

Coventry, now chief steward at Madera Speedway, remembers the Spencers approaching him with their idea for a chaplaincy ministry. He said the trio "put it to prayer and the Lord answered it and said, 'Yes.'"

"From that point on it's done nothing but grow," Coventry said, adding Ron's impact as a chaplain has been "tremendous."

Others at the racetrack agree.

Randy Nason, a driver from Fresno and a member of Calvary Missionary Baptist Church, said the Spencers' ministry has made "a big difference" in the atmosphere of the racetrack.

Dave Stoik, a race car owner from Salinas, said the Spencers "have always been right here to welcome me" to the track. "They are the nicest people you can meet in racing."

Coventry also is track promoter at Plaza Park Raceway in Visalia, Calif., where the Spencers, now supported in part by their church, started another chaplaincy ministry last year. He said people sometimes ask why anyone would do ministry at a racetrack.

"Well, the Lord doesn't want us to go into the little nice places where we are ... all on the same page," Coventry responded. "We need to talk to the people and bring them in. We have to become 'fishers of men.'"

Just the same, Chris recalls that fear of disapproval by racers and spectators kept them from giving a promotional flyer to one driver's son at their first race.

"We figured he was going to be our first rejection," she said. "Finally Ron and I looked at each other and said, 'God did not send us out here to pick and choose.' So we handed him a flier and he looked at it and said, 'Oh wow, this is really cool!'"

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Chris, an escrow agent during the week, became a track official in Madera two years ago. As a "pit steward" she helps coordinate the weighing, classifying and lining up of cars prior to each race.

The Spencers typically arrive at Madera Speedway -- whose motto is, "We'll sell you the whole seat, but you only need the edge" -- early on Saturday afternoon. They begin by distributing flyers promoting chapel services for drivers, their crews and families, and stay until the last race concludes, usually about 11 p.m.

The couples' children, Paul, 12, and Natalie, 8, usually accompany them to the track. Ron's mother also has become an avid racing fan and "baby-sits" during the races.

Services are held prior to each evening's racing events. Average attendance is 15, although as many as 25 drivers, crew members, relatives and track officials have participated in the brief devotional and prayer. Ron said other services have been so well attended that "you couldn't even count because the room was full and we had to leave the door open because they were standing outside listening."

Ron also leads the invocation at the grandstand prior to the beginning of the races and acts as a mediator when the atmosphere at the track becomes tense. The security department now calls him first when a fight breaks out among drivers and crews.

"Fortunately, I have a calming effect," he explained. "Some of it's just respect. You know, 'Oh the preacher's here -- we better behave.' But I can calm them down and get them to realize that it isn't going to change what happened, so why go kill each other?"

Although there are more than 100 people involved with the race cars, including about 30 drivers, their pit crews and families, Ron tries to have personal contact with each of them.

"We do a lot out here -- a lot of one-on-one," he said.

Each year the staff at Madera Speedway votes for an employee of the year, and although Ron is not a paid staff member, he was given the honor in 1994.

Track officials have offered to pay Ron for his ministry but he has consistently refused, saying he only has "one Boss" and doesn't want outside interference in "his church."

The racetrack ministry also involves spending time at the hospital comforting drivers who have been involved in racing accidents, as well as their families. Ron usually rides along in the ambulance on the way to the hospital.

"There have been nights we've been at the hospital almost all night after being here all day," he said.

Although no drivers have been killed while the Spencers were at the track, "there have been some close ones," he said. Since their chaplaincy ministry began, two of their friends have died in crashes when the Spencers were not present.

Bob Chandler, a former driver and now a race car owner, met the Spencers four years ago at the track. "They've been a lot of support," Chandler said.

After he suffered a heart attack earlier this year, Chandler heard a voice outside his hospital room saying, "I'm his chaplain!"

"Knowing he was there was wonderful," Chandler said. "He takes it so seriously. They're good people."

Chandler and the Spencers have joined together for ministries outside the racetrack, like the time they held a car show for Rescue the Children, a ministry of the Fresno Rescue Mission. Nearly a dozen drivers brought their cars to the show.

"There was something like a quarter of a million dollars worth of race cars there, right in the middle of skid row," Chandler recalled.

"We like to use the race cars to benefit the community," Chris said. "Bob and a couple of other guys brought their own cameras and their own film" and took Polaroid pictures of children sitting in the cars. Each child got a picture as a keepsake.

"It's not like just writing out a check. It's more important to do hands on," Chandler continued. "If we couldn't do some good with these cars, I think I would quit."

Since they once owned and raced a car, the Spencers have a complete workshop at their home. They often invite drivers to use the facility for repairs on their vehicles. Several drivers have spent the night with the Spencers while they completed work. "We're willing to do whatever it takes," Ron said.

At Visalia's Plaza Park Raceway, the Spencers' ministry includes Friday night motorcycle racing and Sunday auto racing. In addition to serving as track officials, the Spencers also are working to expand their ministry.

"It's really a ministry to the staff," Ron said. "This year the relationship with the drivers is starting to develop."

Saturday night as cars line up for races at Madera Speedway, Ron makes himself available to pray and to encourage drivers. He also visits crew members and drivers as they work on their cars in the pit area.

"I was watching (Ron) come down the line the other night ... and these guys are hanging their hands out their cars to shake his hand," Chris said. "I thought, 'Oh wow, we really do make a difference!' I was almost in tears because it really showed me that it means a lot to these guys that somebody cares enough to take the time" to pray for them.

"They know he loves them unconditionally," Chris said. "I watch these people respond to him because of his transparency, because of his willingness to let them see Jesus in him."

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Smith is news assistant for The California Southern Baptist, newsjournal of California Southern Baptist Convention.

NASCAR fans hear gospel
from Baptist association

By John W. Fox

Baptist Press
10/18/95

MARTINSVILLE, Va. (BP)--On most Sundays between February and November, 50,000 to 200,000 people find it almost impossible to make it to church.

These are fans of NASCAR Winston Cup racing. Many of them come in campers and motor homes on Thursday, stay through the race on Sunday and then move on to a race somewhere else the next weekend.

In April and September, when the Winston Cup series races are run at the Martinsville Speedway, 60,000 people are at the south Virginia racetrack on Sunday. The Henry County Baptist Association and its Raceway Ministries make it possible for race fans to worship prior to the race, and they do a lot more.

Eighty or more volunteers provide free coffee, lemonade, homemade snacks, souvenirs and gospel tracts to the fans, and occasionally make it possible to obtain a driver's autograph.

Raceway Ministries is a cooperative ministry of the 33 member churches of the association. The volunteer-intensive ministry is funded from the association's budget, the Virginia Baptist State Missions Offering, gifts from churches and individuals and unsolicited donations from fans.

The ministry center is a bright green 15-by-15 tent, purchased with funds provided by a Bold Mission Thrust grant from the Virginia Baptist General Board. Located on a road to the camping area just beyond the vendors, the ministry center has access to the 500-plus camper units and to the line of fans waiting to purchase the 8,000 unreserved tickets that go on sale at 7:30 on Sunday morning.

On a typical September, race fans from 18 states and Canada drink 1,000 cups of coffee and 50 gallons of lemonade and eat tons of homemade goodies. Seven thousand brochures featuring Christian race drivers are distributed.

The ministry center is open Friday afternoon, all day Saturday and on Sunday until race time.

A stage that opens out of the ministry trailer, built by men of the association with funds from the VBGB grant, combined with portable chairs make an outdoor chapel. On Saturday night, fans enjoy a program of gospel music presented by individuals and groups from the association's churches.

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Sunday morning begins at 6:00 as volunteers serve coffee, ham biscuits and gospel tracts to those in line to buy tickets. The worship service at 8:30 a.m. features special gospel music and a testimony or gospel message, or both, from someone within the racing community. An opportunity is given in each service for a response to be made to the gospel.

Raceway Ministries is a seed-sowing ministry. The impact on people's lives is not always known, but reports come from a variety of sources about lives that are being touched and changed.

Following a recent Labor Day weekend race in Darlington, S.C., word was received a couple had shared with their workers how they had received Christ in the Raceway Ministries worship services in Martinsville in April 1993.

Another example: Through a chance encounter between a member of a Henry County association church and a doctor from Maine (both families were stranded by flood waters in Florida) the doctor had recommitted his life to Christ in the worship service in Martinsville in April 1994.

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Fox is director of missions for the Henry County (Va.) Baptist Association.

He roots for everyone
behind a steering wheel

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--"I don't have any favorites," says Steve Vaughan of the drivers he ministers to on Friday nights as chaplain Southside Speedway near Richmond, Va.

"I pull for all of them and they know it," the pastor of Second Branch Baptist Church, Chesterfield, says of the races, ranging from late-model down to go-carts.

"Sometimes, I'm the only one pulling for them besides their team and family. The crowd just wants to be entertained and doesn't care if there are problems or crashes. The drivers really appreciate someone caring for them as people.

"They need support and encouragement because many times they work all week on a car only to get into a wreck on Friday night and have to start all over again the next week," Vaughan says.

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Couple's wedding vows
led to kidney transplant

By Bonnie Verlander

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JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--When the pastor said "in sickness and in health" during the wedding ceremony on Aug. 12, 1976, neither James Edward "Ed" or Theresa Waters knew how true this statement would be.

Ed, of Jacksonville, is a long-term diabetic who has suffered various health complications. He also is stricken with a heart disease passed down through his family.

Several years ago, his condition worsened as his kidneys began to fail. Waters spent two years on dialysis while hoping for a kidney transplant. Because of his heart condition and failing health, he was turned down by Emory Hospital in Atlanta and Shands Hospital in Gainesville, Fla.

Shands Hospital required the donor match at least four major HLA antigens before they would consider the surgery. According to Waters, a three- to four-antigen match comes only when an immediate family member donates the organ. However, this was not an option for Waters because of the heart disease in his family. Theresa, his wife, was tested and she matched only two antigens.

Options were limited for Waters and he knew his time was limited. "At this point in my journey, I finally got down on my knees and prayed," Ed said.

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Ed reconciled himself to the fact his life on earth probably would soon be over. Due to the kidney failure, he developed congestive heart failure as well. It was then that a friend recommended Waters to Tom Peters, a doctor at Methodist Medical Center (MMC) in Jacksonville, Fla.

Feeling he had nothing to lose, Waters visited Peters and discussed his options. The encouragement Peters provided was overwhelming, said Waters. Peters found spousal donors usually work as well as three- or four-antigen match donors. After testing Theresa, Peters determined the match was close enough and set up the transplant. According to Waters, that was a miracle from God.

"Dr. Peters made sure I understood the risk and discussed with Theresa and me the chances we had for a successful transplant," Waters noted. "We didn't expect for me to die but Theresa and I both knew that I was prepared."

He explained the kidney probably would not start working right away, if at all, Waters said. It might take several days in the hospital, under close watch and medication, before the kidney would work properly, he said.

On Tuesday, July 25, at 11 a.m., Theresa went down to the operating room. Ed was still in the pre-operating room.

"When they began to roll me down to the operating room, I felt myself lift off the bed," Waters recounted. "That's the only way I can describe it. At that moment, I could feel myself in the palm of my Lord's hand."

Approximately six hours later, Waters woke up in the recovery room. He immediately felt better, despite the medication. Soon after the surgery, he told doctors, he was ready to go home.

However, Theresa did not fare as well on the operating table. During the operation a blood vessel ruptured and the medical team had to delay the transplant surgery in order to locate and stabilize the internal bleeding. This was accomplished and they were able to remove the kidney. Doctors later told Waters that had the rupture not happened on the operating table, she might not have lived. Waters claims this as a second miracle in their lives.

He boasts a third miracle from God when he was on the operating table. Despite doctors' predictions for the delay of the proper functioning of the kidney, it began working almost immediately, he said.

After no more than two days in the hospital, Waters returned home. But not before several consultations with medical teams. "The doctors were amazed at my quick recovery. I knew it was from God," Waters said.

Today, he and Theresa are slowly settling back to their normal lifestyle. They are resuming their church activities at Avondale Baptist Church, Jacksonville, where they have been members for seven years. Theresa teaches Sunday school and Ed is a newly elected deacon.

"Our friends at church have been so supportive," Waters said. "The comfort they provided was like being out on a cold winter night and someone wrapping you up in a warm blanket."

Theresa has returned to work for half days where she is a customer service representative for a janitorial service. Ed is a retired senior manager for accounting at CSX and is looking for ways to work sometime soon.

"I feel like I have my life back again and I want to be used by the Lord," Waters said. "The Lord gave me a healing and I want to be obedient to his will. I know he has a mission for me."

"I traveled all around this country trying to find the medicine to heal me," Waters said. "I would have saved a lot of effort, time and money had I gotten on my knees in the beginning and gone to the ultimate healer."

"My dream is to announce what the Lord has done for me in front of 76,000 fans at a Jacksonville Jaguars football game. I want everyone to know the Lord is still in the business of answering prayers."

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