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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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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Herschel H. Hobbs, Southern
Baptist legend, dies at 88

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
11/29/95

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--One of Southern Baptists' most loved and best known figures, Herschel H. Hobbs, died Nov. 28 in an Oklahoma City hospital. He was 88.

Hobbs was a legend in Southern Baptist life. Pastor, writer, teacher, theologian and statesman were some of the titles Hobbs earned during a ministry of 69 years. A heart attack was listed as the cause of death, according to officials at Baptist Medical Center in Oklahoma City, where he had been hospitalized three times in recent weeks, suffering from congestive heart failure.

Services will be held at First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, but church officials did not know whether the funeral would be Friday, Dec. 1, or Saturday, Dec. 2. Eugene Garrison, Hobbs' successor as pastor at the church, is expected to officiate. The Guardian Funeral Home, Mid-Town, across from the church, is handling arrangements, officials said.

Hobbs was first and foremost a pastor, according to his autobiography, "Herschel H. Hobbs: My Faith and Message," published in 1993.

"If I had 10,000 lives to live, I would want to be a pastor in every one of them," Hobbs said in his book. He was pastor of First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, for 23 years and pastor-emeritus since 1973.

But to many he was "Mr. Southern Baptist" because of his leadership in the Southern Baptist Convention as a prolific writer, popular teacher and theologian and esteemed statesman for the nation's largest evangelical denomination.

A former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Hobbs is probably best known as chairman of the 24-member committee to draft a statement of Baptist beliefs, a statement now known as the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message. It remains a foundational guideline of beliefs undergirding the SBC and its agencies.

In 1985, Hobbs was named to the 22-member Peace Committee that studied the SBC doctrinal controversy that erupted in 1979.

He was also a member of the boards of trustees of the Foreign Mission Board, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary as well as a member of the SBC Executive Committee.

Millions of people around the world knew Hobbs as the "Baptist Hour" preacher. He preached more than 700 sermons on the Radio and TV Commission-syndicated worship service in a ministry that began with a three-month agreement in 1958 but grew into 20 years.

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Southern Baptists sat at his feet for 28 years through a quarterly Sunday school lesson commentary for adult teachers. He was the Baptist Sunday School Board's most prolific writer, writing Bible study textbooks and many other books and articles for the board. Hobbs had completed lessons through September 1996, according to board officials. He continued to write a newspaper column titled "Baptist Beliefs."

For a young man baptized in a rural creek in Montevallo, Ala., at the age of 11, Hobbs life became an adventure.

As president of the SBC from 1961-63, Hobbs visited in the White House with President John F. Kennedy. He travelled around the world representing his God and Southern Baptists while sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But the churches where he was pastor were always special to him. They included: Vinesville Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala., 1929; Berney Points Baptist Church, Birmingham, 1929-32; Crestwood Baptist Church, Crestwood, Ky., 1937-38; Calvary Baptist Church, Birmingham, 1938-39; Clayton Street Baptist Church, Montgomery, Ala., 1939-41; Emmanuel Baptist Church, Alexandria, La., 1941-45; Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile, Ala., 1945-49; and First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, 1949-1972.

His denominational service included: president of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, president of the SBC Pastor's Conference, president of the board of trustees of Oklahoma Baptist University, moderator of the Oklahoma County Baptist Association, board of directors of the Oklahoma Baptist Foundation, and vice president of the Baptist World Alliance. He preached the annual sermon at the SBC annual meeting in 1957.

Born "an only son of an only son" Oct. 24, 1907 near Talladega Springs, Ala., Hobbs spent much of his early years in rural areas of Alabama. He graduated from Phillips High School in Birmingham. He married Frances Jackson on April 10, 1927.

Accepting a call to preach at 19, Hobbs was ordained to the ministry on June 19, 1929 at Ensley Baptist Church, Birmingham. He finished Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham in 1932 and then received a master of theology degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky. in 1935 and a doctor of philosophy in New Testament Interpretation in 1938.

Herschel Harold Hobbs is survived by a son, Jerry, Houston, and two granddaughters. Hobbs' wife, Frances, preceded him in death in 1984.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by BSSB bureau of Baptist Press and posted on SBCNet.

Friends of Herschel Hobbs
mourn; recall his life

Baptist Press
11/29/95

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Herschel Hobbs's death Nov. 28 is a great loss to Southern Baptists. Many of his friends, Southern Baptist leaders themselves, mourned his death and spoke of their memories.

"Our Southern Baptist Zion has lost one of its greatest stalwarts, one of its greatest preachers, one of its greatest biblical commentators and one of its greatest church leaders and builders," said W.A. Criswell, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Dallas, whose friendship with Hobbs began when they were students at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

"Dr. Hobbs is the Sunday School Board's most prolific writer," said James T. Draper Jr., BSSB president. "Through his quarterly Sunday school lesson commentary for adult teachers which he has written for 28 years, he has influenced the quality of Bible teaching and learning in thousands of classes."

For Criswell and James L. Sullivan, retired BSSB president, Hobbs was a longtime friend.

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"Herschel Hobbs and I have referred to ourselves as 'the gold dust twins,' who were inseparable," Sullivan said. "This was not only because of our close and enduring friendship and associations, but also because we were both reared in the same geographical area, studied under the same professors and saw nearly everything alike when issues arose concerning theology or denominational loyalty. Our associations were many, and our affections for each other remained deep."

Hobbs and Sullivan were classmates at Southern Seminary, Louisville, Ky., from 1932-35 and Criswell was a year ahead of them. All three were working toward masters degrees at the time.

"I have known Dr. Hobbs for over half a century," Criswell said, "and every year has been filled with infinite gratitude to God for his faithfulness, for his scholarship and for his devotion to our Southern Baptist Convention."

The Southern Baptist Convention, Draper said, "will miss his booming voice, his brilliant mind, his wise counsel and his loyal friendship."

Added Criswell: "We can but pray that God will raise up other young men to take his place and to carry onward, forward and triumphantly the marvelous work to which he gave his many years of loving service. We shall miss him sorely and we shall be praying that God will bless the kingdom work to which he devoted his many years."

Another peer and good friend, H. Franklin Paschall, retired longtime pastor of First Baptist Church, Nashville, said Hobbs's leadership (in the denomination) will be sorely missed.

"He was one of the outstanding Baptist leaders of all time," Paschall said. "He served his day and generation well, his writings are a fitting memorial." Paschall said Hobbs was a great "Baptist statesman."

SBC President Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., and Morris H. Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the SBC Executive Committee, Nashville, Tenn., were travelling Nov. 29 and unavailable for comment.

Hobbs spent a lifetime telling people about Jesus Christ.

Bob Norman, pastor of Clearview Baptist Church, Franklin, Tenn., recalled his first encounter with the Christian gospel occurred when he skated into a Baptist church in Birmingham, Ala., to get a drink of water. He was stopped by a large man in a black suit with a booming voice who asked him, "Son, do you know Jesus Christ as your Savior?"

Norman, whose family did not attend church, became a Christian in high school and only later learned the man he had encountered by the drinking fountain was Herschel Hobbs.

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Churches touch communities
by asking how they can help

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press
11/29/95

MARTINSVILLE, Va. (BP)--Scott Waller knows a little bit of outreach can go a long way in helping churches influence their communities.

The director of church and community ministries for the Henry County Baptist Association, Waller has seen churches in his southern Virginia region come alive in responding to community needs uncovered by a volunteer survey.

"The needs of the community should determine our ministries," he said. "In the 1800s when there was a need for medical care, the church built hospitals. It's the same thing with assessing needs today."

Known as a "Community Needs Assessment," the review of social service, government and other community agencies is designed to identify people's needs and how churches can help meet them.

Two-member teams of laypersons, pastors and church staff visit officials for on-site interviews and conclude by offering to pray for them. Afterwards, they gather to complete reports, share insights and hold evaluation and strategy sessions.

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This approach is used nationwide, said Jerry Hutchinson, director of the church ministries department at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. He said training has been done for several years at associational meetings and various conferences, including Glorieta (N.M.) and Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist conference centers. The HMB offers a free, four-page form on doing a needs assessment, which can be obtained via SBCNet or by calling the HMB at 1-800-634-2462.

The ministries director said the HMB believes church members are more likely to participate in ministry if they believe it is addressing a heartfelt need.

Partnership with the community is good ministry, said Hutchinson, because it helps avoid duplication and identifies places where churches can help. Surveys always uncover a number of projects that can be done by a Sunday school class, missions group or couple, he said.

Another valuable aspect of an assessment and follow-up action is the opportunity to build relationships, he said, which allows believers to demonstrate their faith, share a verbal witness and generate goodwill in the community.

Several officials, such as Joyce Martin, acting director of Henry County Social Services, expressed surprise that churches cared enough to come talk to them.

"We are overwhelmed with people in need, and yet our resources are shrinking," she said. "This is the first time someone has come to us and asked what we need."

"This also can raise the awareness of Southern Baptists, particularly in areas where we're not that well known," he said. "And we have demonstrated that this procedure can be used in any kind of setting -- a rural county or an urban environment, whether it's a neighborhood or a certain area."

Though Martinsville has less than 20,000 people and Henry County's population is approximately 45,000, association volunteers who went out last spring were surprised at the volume of problems they uncovered in visits with 31 different agencies.

"I am totally amazed at the number of people who require so many different kinds of assistance, both financial and physical help," said Don Martin of Chatham Heights Baptist Church. Observed Margaret Caldwell, a member of Starling Avenue Baptist Church, "There is overwhelming need in our community. Churches need to hear the stories, see and respond to their neighbors."

The association compiled the data into a 24-page report that listed a heavy demand for volunteers. Among them were providing homes for children, transportation, tutoring, child care, acting as sponsors for school functions, visiting the homebound, delivering meals and doing home repairs.

The report included a list of possible one-time projects, such as building a wheelchair ramp, cleaning parks or yards, fixing up homes, hauling furniture or helping families move, especially the elderly and disabled.

Churches in the association that have acted on the report, according to Waller, include:

- Chatham Heights Baptist -- using the report to further study agencies that work with small children as a first step toward helping in that area. Also, a young-adult Sunday school class has visited a low-income nursing home and is setting up a project to help seniors with cleaning yards and homes.

- An Acteens group from Blackberry Baptist Church's Woman's Missionary Union -- visiting at an adult day-care center as a ministry service project.

- Villa Heights Baptist Church -- forming a relationship with a spouse abuse center, Citizens Against Family Violence. Volunteers have visited women and children there and helped supply some children's clothing.

- Oak Level Baptist Church -- printing a list of specific needs, such as school supplies, in its bulletin each month.

For Waller, the bottom line is what this kind of survey should represent to the body of Christ.

"This is a springboard for healing and action," he said. "One director of missions did this and right before the people left, he said, 'I like the idea of what we're doing. If Jesus were here in the flesh, he would be going out and listening.'"

**Surveys can help churches
find school, community role**

By Ken Walker

WACO, Texas (BP)--Communication between churches and public schools is among the potential benefits of a community needs assessment, according to one of the ministry tool's creators.

"Whether it's a WMU group or Sunday school class, people are discovering the public schools are wide open to volunteers," said Nathan Porter of Waco, Texas, community needs assessment specialist for the Baptist General Convention of Texas. "I think that the best ally of the church for ministry to children and families are the public schools."

Porter said he developed the community analysis over a number of years, through his work in college evangelism when several Baptist Student Unions looked at local hunger needs.

Community-wide examinations got a major boost three years ago at a Mississippi River Ministries convocation in Memphis, Tenn., Porter said. The seven-state coalition is aimed at attacking the problems of poverty, low literacy and inadequate health care in the states along the river.

"We believe if the church is going to minister to human needs, we must meet those who are addressing them," said Porter, who also has been a consultant to the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. "It builds a lot of goodwill and involves agency input. Then when the churches go out, they're doing it with community support."

In the past, Texas Baptists' church ministries department had hired consultants periodically to look at community needs, he said. While they gathered impressive statistics and wrote good reports, afterwards they were filed away and forgotten "because nobody in the community owned it," he said.

But that changed with Texas shifting to volunteer assessments.

"This year some associations had more people involved in their surveys than they have had in their associational meetings," Porter said. "It's exciting."

The most recent assessment he helped conduct occurred in Portland, Ore. Even though there is a large gap there between church and community, he said, their visits were fairly well received.

More than 30 volunteers contacted 42 schools and agencies in the city. They uncovered 366 needs and opportunities for ministry, including 13 requests from one school for teacher's aides, tutors, hall and cafeteria monitors and other helpers.

Twenty-one schools and other groups called for churches to offer activities for children and youth, he said. Even better: "They'll give churches support, input and help them develop the program."

The other primary demand is help for senior citizens, Porter said. One Portland seniors center tries to maintain contact with the people it serves but is short on personnel to handle that task. The SBC's experience in telephone calling and visitation fits that need, he said.

And the reaction from community officials was favorable.

"Many indicated they were glad to see the church come in and get involved, developing trust in the public schools and developing relationships by working with them," Porter said. "The police chief was extremely grateful -- he challenged the volunteers to be involved in their community."

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**Michigan Baptists pray,
affirm SBC race resolution**

**Baptist Press
11/29/95**

JACKSON, Mich. (BP)--With "Launching Out" as the theme for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan's 38th annual meeting and a 1996 emphasis on "Start Something New," 261 messengers gathered Nov. 7-9 at Gorham Baptist Church, Jackson.

Among convention highlights:

-- a Wednesday evening time of prayer when messengers and guests paired off to ask the Lord to send laborers for each other's ministries.

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-- Bible studies led by Gary Frost, pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church, Youngstown, Ohio, and second vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and the convention sermon by Rochelle Davis, pastor of Temple of Faith Baptist Church, Detroit.

-- passage of a resolution supporting the Southern Baptist Convention racial reconciliation resolution addressing racism and slavery, adopted last June during the SBC's sesquicentennial in Atlanta.

-- near-unanimous approval, after several questions and answers, of a new constitution and bylaws providing a ministries-oriented thrust for the convention. Mike Lee, pastor of the host congregation, served as chairman of the committee that prepared the documents.

A 1996 budget of \$3,009,491 was approved, including an anticipated \$1,379,284 in Cooperative Program giving by the convention's 300 congregations. Michigan Baptist ministries will receive 68 percent of the CP gifts; SBC national and international missions and ministries, 32 percent. The percentages are unchanged from 1995.

Officers elected for 1996 are Bob Galey, pastor of Oakland Woods Baptist Church, Clarkston, president by acclamation; Ray Shelton, pastor of Friendship Baptist Church, Lincoln Park, first vice president in a two-way ballot; James Kennedy, pastor of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, Flint, second vice president in a three-way ballot and a runoff. John Harrison, pastor of Bethany Baptist Church, Lansing, was re-elected recording secretary.

Also approved at the meeting was a revision to the Phase II expansion of Bambi Lake Retreat and Conference Center in 1998, setting the project's cost at \$300,000 instead of \$800,000 as originally planned. A Bambi Lake ministry committee also was formed.

This year's convention was operating under a new schedule, entailing five sessions and dismissing at noon on Thursday instead of Thursday evening.

Next year's annual meeting will be Nov. 5-7 at Emmanuel Baptist Church, Midland.

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Julie Scheving contributed to this article.

Northwest Baptists adopt new vision; GGBTS fulfills pledge By Donald J. Sorensen

Baptist Press
11/29/95

PASCO, Wash. (BP)--A near record number of messengers attended the 48th annual session of the Northwest Baptist Convention at Pasco where they received good news in the form of a \$500,000 gift from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary and approved a Fresh Statement About the Future, a document to chart a course for the convention.

The convention, held Nov. 13-16, attracted 501 registered messengers and 113 visitors for a total of 614. A spirit of excitement and harmony prevailed over the meeting.

Messengers were surprised at the announcement by Golden Gate President William O. Crews that the seminary would accelerate its pledge of \$50,000 a year for 10 years to help pay for the Northwest Baptist Center, the new office building under construction.

Instead of paying it over 10 years, Crews said trustees decided to pay it early and he presented NWBC Executive Director Jeff Iorg with a check for \$300,000 as the first installment. The balance, Crews said, would come shortly after the first of the year. The convention erupted into prolonged applause at the announcement.

The Fresh Statement was developed by Iorg after months of conversation with many in the Northwest as a statement about "our conviction, our vision and our cooperative strategy."

Iorg, at his first annual convention as executive director, also reported talks are being held with the Baptist General Convention of Texas to develop a "strategic partnership by which we can work together." The idea will be studied over the next year and considered for action at the NWBC meeting next year.

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In convention business, a Cooperative Program budget of \$2,115,249 was approved, a 4.6 percent increase over the current year. The percentage to world missions remains the same at 31 percent. The total budget is \$3,941,689.

Terry Little, pastor of Pines Baptist, Spokane, Wash., was elected president over Mark Bradley, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist, Pullman, Wash. Stanley Hughts was picked for first vice president over Bruce Sloan, pastor of Calvary Baptist, Canby, Ore., Ronald L. Bryant, layman from Redmond, Ore., was unopposed as second vice president.

Resolutions all had to do with local convention issues.

The 1966 convention will be held in Eugene, Ore., Nov. 12-14.

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Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich
tapped to launch new church

By Dan Nicholas

Baptist Press
11/29/95

ERIE, Pa. (BP)--Nearly two months after its beginning, 200 mostly young "seekers" attend Millcreek Community Church in Erie, Pa. Millcreek's first worship service, Oct. 1, was attended by 234 people, in what is being called the largest first worship service of a Southern Baptist church in the Northeast.

Ed Stetzer, a graduate of the Northeastern Baptist School of Ministry/Pittsburgh, and his wife, Donna, moved to Erie, the third-largest metropolitan area in Pennsylvania, 18 months ago to plant the congregation.

Stetzer, 29, had started and was pastor of Calvary Christian Church, Buffalo, N.Y., and, earlier, was pastor of youth and students at Calvary Baptist Church, Rome, Ga.

After moving to Erie, the couple began seven small groups, two of them in October after the first worship. Home-based cell groups are important to Millcreek's growth because many people feel more comfortable in such settings than in a church building.

To draw people to Millcreek's first worship, Stetzer developed an innovative media strategy. He wrote to and received replies from President Clinton and Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, publishing their greetings in a newspaper with a banner reading, "Clinton and Gingrich Finally Agree: Millcreek Community Church is an Exciting Place to Be." Three television stations and two local newspapers extensively covered the church's opening.

Millcreek operates out of a 230-seat facility once home to a former Southern Baptist congregation and now owned by the Northwest Pennsylvania Association of Baptists.

Because the building was filled on the church's first day and remains at capacity, Stetzer said he plans to begin a second worship there on Easter Sunday 1996.

Millcreek's upbeat worship style features a 12-member worship band that includes two keyboards, two guitars, drums, bass and vocalists.

Stetzer said he attributes the church's rapid development to the fact that he planned for a "seeker-sensitive, cell-based, contemporary" Southern Baptist church for young baby boomers.

Stetzer learned many of his church-growth ideas from Elmer Towns at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, Va., from which he graduated in 1994 with a master's degree in religion with an emphasis in church growth. Also in 1994, he earned a master of divinity degree with a concentration in pastoral studies from the Northeastern Baptist School of Ministry/Pittsburgh.

Stetzer is the only student to have both started and completed a degree at NeBSM/Pittsburgh. Other students have transferred credits to and then graduated from the center.

The school of ministry is one component of the Northeastern Baptist Education Consortium (NeBEC), created by the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania/South Jersey, the Baptist Convention of New York and the Baptist Convention of New England to provide theological education and ministry training in the context of the Northeast.

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In addition to Pittsburgh, NeBEC's school of ministry campuses are located in Harrisburg, Pa.; Boston; New York; Baltimore; and Silver Spring, Md. NeBSM degrees are granted through NeBEC's partnership with Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky. NeBEC also partners with the Southern Baptist Seminary Extension office and with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Stetzer and the Millcreek members plan to share their blessings by planting an identical congregation next summer some 30 miles south of Erie, in the town of Meadville, Penn.

"The Lord's been good and gracious to us," Stetzer said. "We're excited about what he's done here and what he will do in the future. God's called me to start churches."

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More information about the Northeastern Baptist Education Consortium is available in its newsletter, which can be ordered by calling 1-800-749-5956 or faxing (410) 671-7795.

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