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Herschel Hobbs remembered  
as friend, prayer partner

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press  
12/4/95

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--Friends and loved ones gathered Dec. 2 for a final farewell for Herschel H. Hobbs, memorializing the Southern Baptist statesman as one of the "great men of the Christian faith."

The memorial service for Hobbs, 88, who died Nov. 28 of a heart attack, was held in the Louise Prichard Chapel of First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, where he was pastor for 23 years. More than 400 people attended the hour-long service and then, with the casket open, paid their last respects to the denominational leader. Burial was Dec. 4 in Birmingham, Ala., Hobbs's native state.

Hobbs had requested the service be held in the chapel, where his wife, Frances, was memorialized following her death in 1984. Hobbs, as pastor from 1949-72, designed the chapel including beautiful stained-glass "teaching windows." Hobbs recently had asked his longtime friend, W.A. Criswell, longtime pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, to officiate his memorial service.

"We (Hobbs and Criswell) have been friends since 1931," Criswell said, "and I have never had a sweeter prayer partner and encourager in all of my life."

Some had called Hobbs "Mr. Southern Baptist," Criswell said, and there is "nothing more appropriate" for what he did for Southern Baptists. Hobbs was a natural peacemaker, Criswell said, noting the two had never had a disagreement over the years.

Criswell even recalled when he got married, while at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., that it was Hobbs who wrestled away the key for a get-away car from another student so the newlyweds could leave on their honeymoon.

"You would have thought (Hobbs) would have been egotistical (for all of his accomplishments)," Criswell said, "but that was the farthest thing from the truth. He was the humblest, sweetest person you could ever know."

Criswell recalled Hobbs must have known his time was short because Hobbs told him at the 1995 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Atlanta "this is my last convention." It was just two weeks before his death that Hobbs, with Criswell as participants at a dedication ceremony for the Beeson Divinity School at Samford University, Birmingham, told Criswell, "I want you to conduct my memorial service." Criswell said he would never forget the look on Hobbs face.

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Criswell spoke from Hebrews 11:40 and Philippians 1:21, recalling "God hath provided some better thing for us . . . ." Criswell said Hobbs "went to glory" while talking to his son, Jerry, on the phone beside his hospital bed.

Gene Garrison, successor to Hobbs as pastor of the Oklahoma City church, said Hobbs is "more fully alive now than he has ever been . . . ." He said Hobbs was one of the "great men of the Christian faith."

"He was a preacher's preacher, a pastor's pastor," Garrison said.

The simple service drew many SBC and Oklahoma Baptist leaders, many of whom stayed to visit with the Hobbs family.

In addition to Criswell and Garrison, others on the program were Clif Baker, former minister of music at the church who sang "Amazing Grace;" Allen York, the church's minister of music who sang the gospel song played when Hobbs was converted, "Let Jesus Come Into Your Heart;" and William J. Reynolds, longtime Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary music professor in Texas, who sang "It Is Well With My Soul."

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. But Hobbs saw himself first and foremost as a pastor, according to his autobiography, "Herschel H. Hobbs: My Faith and Message."

"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.

As a former president of the SBC, Hobbs is probably best remembered 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.

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(BP) photos from Hobbs' funeral available upon request from Bob Mathews of the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger.

Congress deliberating over  
bill targeting computer porn

By Clay Renick

Baptist Press  
12/4/95

WASHINGTON (BP)--The battle lines have moved to the family room in the struggle over computer pornography. Several congressmen have offered bills to address the problem, and one key measure is in a House-Senate conference committee.

The Internet is unrestricted. Children have access through home computers and pedophiles look there for victims.

"Cyberporn is far more deviant, violent and perverse than what is available in the hardest-core X-rated video or bookstore in most American cities," said Richard D. Land, president of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"The U.S. Supreme Court has never granted First Amendment protection to obscenity."

The Internet is the burgeoning computer network encompassing more than 30 million users worldwide. Users praise the access to libraries and "chat rooms." But the argument continues over the need for control.

The measure currently before a House-Senate conference committee would impose fines of up to \$100,000 and prison sentences on people who knowingly transmit pornography or material deemed "filthy," "lewd" or "indecent." The conference involves a Senate bill spearheaded by Jim Exon, D.-Neb., and Dan Coats, R.-Ind.

On Dec. 1, a coalition of commercial on-line services and some civil liberties groups agreed to a number of provisions, "bowing to a seemingly unstoppable push in Congress to keep sexual material off the Internet," according to a report in The New York Times.

"People need to know this stuff is out there," said Donna Rice Hughes with the Enough is Enough organization dedicated to fighting the spread of pornography.

"An elder of a church isn't going to buy Penthouse magazine at a convenience store, Hughes added. "Someone might see him."

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"Now he can go into his computer and access that."

According to Penthouse magazine, their on-line publication gets 2.9 million requests for information every day on the Internet.

But the problem goes beyond nudity into graphic bestiality, incest, rape, defecation and sex with children.

"Until now, society has said a pornography distributor has a legal responsibility to ensure that minors do not have access to pornographic material," Land explained.

But some computer users remain adamant for open access to the Internet and say the need for protection lies with the family.

"This is a devastating shift in the legal philosophy," Land noted.

Computer services like CompuServe, American Online and Prodigy provide access to the Internet. According to USA Today, America Online is the fastest-growing provider. It offers some help for parents who want to block offensive material, via "parent control" features that can be activated to block connections to particular on-line chat forums.

At Prodigy, meanwhile, up to 200,000 people a month use the chat rooms to communicate with other computer users. And the traffic often passes national boundaries.

Carnegie Mellon University did an 18-month study of computer porn. They found 917,410 sexually explicit pictures and descriptions. Most of the worst material came from adult bulletin board services.

Users then pay a subscription fee every month for such bulletin board. But according to Hughes, any barriers there are easily passed.

"Children today are increasingly computer literate," she said. "Any child with a computer and a modem can view the most vile and deviant forms of pornography in seconds."

Time magazine reviewed the Carnegie Mellon study and said the worst computer porn comes from Usnet news groups, a collection of publications and adult bulletin boards. But the Usnet represents only 11.5 percent of the Internet traffic.

Porn traders also use "home pages" to swap pictures.

"You don't even know who you're talking to," said Hughes about friends met on the computer. "Sometimes they (pedophiles) pose as children."

Joe Smith (not his real name) graduated from college when his problem started with computer porn. He was in seminary and engaged. Then his relationship ended.

"He wanted help but didn't know where to look," said Dee Jepsen, president of Enough is Enough.

Joe started with computer porn. It became his way to cope.

"It escalated in the type of material he was looking at," Jepsen recounted.

Joe's addiction followed a pattern. He needed material that was more explicit and got into child pornography on the Internet. He even tried to solicit sex with a 13-year-old.

Police intervened and he now awaits trial.

"The 13-year-old he was caught with was going out two or three times a week with the people he met on the computer," Jepsen said.

"We need some laws."

As the Exon-Coats bill remains in committee, the Internet remains open and children remain unaware.

"It's the electronic wild west," Jepsen said. "It's going to be very hard to filter."

"I do not believe anyone has the 'right' to make or to view images of children or adults being raped, tortured or degraded in a host of unspeakable ways," the CLC's Land said. "Any society that asserts or defends such a 'right' reveals only its own depravity."

Regardless of any congressional action, "ultimately this issue will be resolved in the courts," predicted Marc Rotenberg, head of the Electronic Privacy and Information Center in Washington.

**Baptists called to action  
as Watchtower comes to N.C.**

**By David Winfrey**

SALISBURY, N.C. (BP)--Former Jehovah's Witness George Kesterson doesn't mince words about his previous faith.

"Our hope is to put the Watchtower out of business in Salisbury," said Kesterson of his new work in the North Carolina town. As director of Watching th Watchtower, he trains Southern Baptists and other church members about Witn ss beliefs and teachings.

Earlier this year, Jehovah's Witnesses opened an assembly hall in Salisbury -- an 88,000-square-foot facility that serves as a regional training center for 367 Jehovah's Witness congregations in six states.

Kesterson responded with a campaign to educate residents and an interstate billboard advertising a recorded message refuting Witness teachings.

Also known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Jehovah's Witnesses are classified as a cult by the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness departm nt, said associate director Tal Davis.

Witnesses deny the deity of Christ and the historic doctrine of the Trinity, Davis said. They also teach salvation is impossible outside the Watchtower and only 144,000 witnesses will make it into heaven, he said. Witnesses believe their group's members who don't get into heaven live forever on a paradise earth, Davis added. In the past 125 years, the group has falsely predicted Armageddon five times.

Their new presence in Salisbury has met with a mixed reception, said Richard Horn, pastor of nearby Landis Baptist Church. "Economically, it's been a boom. Motels are building rooms," he said. "Religiously, it has brought confusion because they're out there knocking on doors every weekend."

Witnesses are encouraged to visit homes and distribute Watchtower materials for at least 10 hours each month, and residents near the center say they are inundated with visits. "I had them stop by twice in one evening," said Frances Basinger.

"If I think it's them, I don't go to the door," added Cindy Miller, Basinger's daughter. Miller, who lives on the same street as the center, estimates Witnesses hav visited her home several dozen times this year. "When they come, you can't get rid of them."

When the center opened, Witness officials estimated 2,000 members would come each week. "They bring them in by the bus load," Horn said.

"What the Mormons are to Salt Lake City, economically and religiously, is what the Jehovah's Witnesses are going to be to Salisbury, N.C., if we don't take a stand," he added. "They'll turn all our churches into kingdom halls. We're trying to protect our people."

Kesterson's efforts included a "'stick 'em up" campaign in November, distributing door decals stating, "No visits by Jehovah's Witnesses" and listing the number for the weekly telephone message.

Kesterson is a Mission Service Corps volunteer with the Home Mission Board. As a volunteer of more than two years, he is a home missionary.

He and local churches also are distributing old Watchtower teaching material that Kesterson said shows the group's false predictions.

A recent revision of Watchtower's monthly magazine presents an opportunity to show major flaws in Witness beliefs, he noted.

Awake! magazines prior to November had included the Watchtower's teaching that Armageddon would occur before the generation of Witnesses born before 1914 di d, Kesterson said. Many Witnesses postponed marriage and other significant events in anticipation of an imminent rapture, he said.

"Wh n you have an end in sight and can see some light at the end of the tunnel, you're willing to forgo a job promotion. You're willing to forgo your college ducation," h said.

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"This is like the final straw. There is n end in sight," h said. "People can stand a lot, but they cannot stand their religion to deceive them."

Kesterson said counter-cult groups should take advantage of this event, which he compares to 1975 -- Witnesses' most recent false prediction of Armag ddon. "The exodus after 1975 could be nothing in comparison with what is going to happen now in the next two or three years."

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(BP) photo of Kesterson (horizontal) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press.

Basic facts about  
Jehovah's Witnesses

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ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)--Here's a brief description of Jehovah's Witnesses and their beliefs, according to the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department:

- Official name: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.
- Founder: Charles Taze Russell, in 1884.
- Headquarters: Brooklyn, N.Y.
- Active participants, also known as Publishers: 4.9 million worldwide in 1994; 945,990 in the United States.
- They believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, but use "The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures," their own version, which has been changed to reflect Watchtower theology. For example, John 1:1 reads, "and the Word was a god," instead of "the word was God."
- They believe the Bible cannot be properly understood without Watchtower literature.
- They refute the Trinity as "false, unbiblical doctrine," originated by Satan. They say Jesus was God's first creation -- the Son of God, but not God the Son, and they believe Jesus' resurrection was spiritual with temporary physical appearances.
- They do not believe in life after death, claiming that God takes back the life at death and creates a new body in which to restore the life.
- They reject salvation by grace through faith, stating that salvation is completed by baptism and active association with the Watchtower Society and that assurance of salvation is not received until the resurrection.
- They believe in two classes of saved people -- 144,000 who will rule with Christ in heaven and the rest who live forever on a new paradise earth.
- They believe hell is the grave, not a place of eternal punishment, and all who are not resurrected are annihilated.
- They have predicted five dates for Armageddon in the past 125 years, the last one being 1975.

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Texas conservative named  
Indiana Baptist editor

By Tammi Ledbetter

Baptist Press  
12/4/95

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--The editor of a Baptist conservative newsletter in Texas has been elected editor of the Indiana Baptist, the official biweekly publication of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana.

John Yeats, 45, pastor of South Park Baptist, Grand Prairie, Texas, received unanimous support from the SCBI executiv board when present d during their regular meeting Nov. 28. In addition to serving several churches in Texas, Yeats spent 13 years as a pastor in the new work area of Topeka, Kan.

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Yeats will serve as communications director for the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, with responsibilities for editing the 5,000-circulation Indiana Baptist, directing public relations and serving as Christian life consultant. He assumes his responsibilities Jan. 8.

Yeats and his wife, Sharon, have three sons: John-Mark, 22; Joel, 19; and Jordan, 14.

When the conservative group, Southern Baptists of Texas, was formed to uphold biblical conservatism and support for traditional Cooperative Program funding in that state, Yeats was selected to serve as editor of the SBT monthly publication, The Plumline. In October, the newsletter became a supplemental wraparound to the Indiana Baptist, with a circulation of 4,500 to Texas Southern Baptists.

In addition to writing editorials and news articles for The Plumline, Yeats has written for various Southern Baptist publications. He serves as an at-large trustee on the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and will retain that position after moving to Indiana.

When making the recommendation to the board from the administrative committee, chairman Duane Floro said, "The Lord definitely has his hand on their home, life and ministry."

A native of Oklahoma, Yeats' family moved to Texas where he was raised in Arlington. Following a call to prepare for ministry, he graduated from Dallas Baptist College. His first involvement with a new work state came as a summer missionary to Montana.

Yeats later graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and served as an intern under Tom Elliff at Eastside Baptist Church, Tulsa, Okla. Yeats said he considers Elliff his mentor in the ministry and commended the Oklahoma church's commitment to planting men in new work states.

During his time in Kansas, Yeats worked with the state Baptists' Christian life committee and lobbied before the state legislature on moral issues. "We developed a network of working with Christians all across the state to see some family values reinstated through the legislative process."

After being called back to Texas in 1991, Yeats led the Grand Prairie church to its present membership of 325, averaging 275 in Sunday school and in Wednesday night services that include an extensive ministry to children and students, teaching systematic theology to more than 100 junior high and high school students.

While never anticipating the opportunity to serve as editor of the Indiana Baptist would arise, Yeats and his wife said they sensed it to be God's will for their lives. "We went to prayer and fasting to seek God's heart and here's where we are," he told the board. "It's the desire of our heart that we be obedient."

Yeats' wife, Sharon, shared her testimony of being saved as a child and later confirming that decision as a young adult. While attending Girls in Action camp, she sensed God's call to full-time Christian service.

"When Dr. Sullivan called us we began to look back over our married life together and the things God has allowed John to do and the walk he's taking us on," she shared. "I told John, 'It's as if God had been preparing you all along for a work such as this.'"

Recognizing the new ministry will be a change from serving as a pastor's wife, Sharon said, "We just want what God wants, anyplace he wants to take us, what he wants us to do. We as a family just want to be in the center of his will."

The board also approved a salary package commensurate with the amount paid the previous editor. Sullivan indicated that all of the directors are paid on the same level with increases for tenure.

Sullivan shared with board members that Yeats "has a dream of helping our paper become a great tool in the local church." He added, "Coming out of a pastorate in a pioneer area in Kansas, he has a great understanding of the new work state. I believe we're going to see the pastoral background that is here demonstrated itself in the kind of paper we have."

Sullivan described Yeats as "a very, v ry staunch conservativ in every r spect," adding, "He's right to the core f being what Indiana is as a conservative state and as a conservative peopl . H has no d sire to make our paper anything other than a conservative paper. That's part of what h said to the group that grilled him for three hours this morning with questions," Sullivan noted in reference to committee interviews.

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Community effort mounted  
for chapel-less prison

By Carrie L. Brown

Baptist Press  
12/4/95

UNION SPRINGS, Ala. (BP)--The 1,000-inmate prison was built without a chapel and only three small classrooms for meetings, thus inmates often are turned away from worship services and Bible study.

Now, thanks to the dedication of several ministers and community volunteers, construction of a chapel at the Bullock County Correctional Facility, Union Springs, Ala., is nearing completion, and ministers should never have to turn inmates away again.

Even before the BCCF opened in 1987, local ministers were developing a plan for ministering to inmates to be housed there.

On Easter Sunday of that year (less than two months after the prison opened), the first worship service was held for the inmates.

As interest in the prison ministry grew among local churches, the Bullock County Ministerial Association was formed to coordinate the religious services and programs at the prison. But the ministers faced the obstacle of trying to schedule space to hold services.

According to warden James DeLoach, approximately 60 religious services ar held at the prison each month. In addition, there are many Bible study groups that meet regularly. As the warden and the committee looked at the situation, the need for a chapel become more and more apparent.

In 1987, the ministerial association formed the Bullock County Chapel Committee as a nonprofit corporation to raise the estimated \$216,000 needed to build the chapel. The chapel committee got its first donation when Midway Baptist Church donated the materials from the old Bullock County High School to the project.

As fund-raising efforts got under way, the Catholic Diocese in Mobile agreed to give \$50,000 if Protestants would match it. The Baptist Foundation of Alabama met the challenge, and the first \$100,000 was raised. An additional \$41,000 was contributed by other groups, including the Mennonites, representatives of the Assemblies of God, Alabama Prison Ministries and several individual churches. The inmates also contributed \$10,000 from the Inmate Welfare Fund.

As the project continued, more and more donations came in. The roofing materials and labor were donated by several Mennonite congregations from around the Southeast. Someone donated seed and fertilizer for the landscaping. A local plumber donated his services, and the Macon County Baptist Association refinished old pews and donated them to the chapel.

The physical work on the chapel began at the old school site. Using inmate and volunteer labor, the school was dismantled. More than 185,000 bricks were salvaged from the building. The lumber from the school also was saved, including the wooden trusses that had supported the gym floor.

Bob Stevenson, mission director for the chapel project, said the chapel actually was designed around the trusses. The freshly stained beams now form the roof supports in the sanctuary.

Onc completed, the sanctuary will seat 250 people. Classrooms in the building will be used for various purposes, including a Bible college and Bible institute for inmates.

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The bulk of the work on the chapel has been done by inmates who are determined to complete the project. Terry Hillyer, an inmate who helps supervise work on the chapel, said their reason is simple.

"The Lord said to build a church, so we're building a church," Hillyer said, voicing hope that the chapel will bring more inmates to Christ.

"If they come just out of curiosity, it'll be worth all the work," he said.

Officer Donald Cunningham, who supervises the inmates as they work, said he can see a difference in the dispositions of the inmates who have worked on the chapel.

"The inmates who are working out here are dedicated to getting the chapel completed," he said. "They feel that they're giving something back to society, and that drives them to do their best."

Cunningham also said working together on the project has brought many of the inmates closer together.

"In the prison, there is an invisible line between black and white inmates. Out here, they work together side by side and then they associate inside," he said. "This is the magnet that drew them together."

"The thanks belongs to God first, and then to Warden DeLoach, the local people and the inmates," Cunningham said.

Tom Randall, pastor of First Baptist Church, Union Springs, and chairman of the ministerial association's chapel steering committee, said the chapel is 98 percent complete. But in order to finish the work, more money will have to be raised.

"Work on the chapel has really slowed down in the last couple of months, because we're out of money," Randall said.

An additional \$55,000 is needed to cover the costs of the doors, light fixtures and heating and air conditioning for the building.

Even though they are anxious to finish the chapel, Randall and other members of the committee are not worried.

"The chapel has been built with Christian funds, by Christian people, for Christian services," Randall said. "The money will come to finish the chapel."

Randall added it has been a rewarding experience for all the volunteers and inmates who have worked on the project.

"It has been wonderful to be involved with Christians from a variety of denominations," Randall said. "The chapel is a testimony to what we can do by working together toward a common interest. We should do more projects like this."

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Brown is a correspondent for The Alabama Baptist newsjournal.

Church's prayer, outreach  
take neighborhood focus

By Orville Scott

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12/4/95

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--A "divine appointment" between a pastor and a former Dallas Cowboys fullback has expanded the outreach of a Fort Worth, Texas, church, in its urban neighborhood.

Gary Miller, pastor of Sagamore Hill Baptist Church, was on a plane for a speaking engagement in Corpus Christi when former Cowboys star Ron Springs sat down beside him.

As they talked, Miller mentioned the church was seeking a way to finance providing warm jackets for more than 750 children at nearby Sagamore Hill Elementary School in east Fort Worth.

"Everson Walls (former Cowboy defensive back) and I have a company that does this kind of program," Springs said.

The next day, Springs called Miller, they formed Cowboys Caring for Kids and soon plans were under way for a benefit basketball game between Cowboys football players and a team from the church soon after the Super Bowl.

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Prior to Thanksgiving, excitement reigned supreme when Springs, Miller and other members of the Sagamore Hill church met with the children and teachers at the school.

Explaining each child would receive a warm jacket, Miller assured them, "You can always know that God loves you, and we love you too."

Springs urged the children to "be good" and "respect your teachers and elders." He stressed the "three Ds of success: dedication, desire and determination" and reminded the students that while only 1 percent of all football players ever make it to the pro ranks, there are many other ways of making a valuable contribution in the world.

"The Lord answered our prayers in a big way," said Ray Visor, Sagamore Hill's minister of missions. "We're praying for delivery of the jackets before Christmas. We're inviting all of the students and their families and the school faculty to our Christmas candlelight service.

"We're looking at adopting the school through the 'Adopt a School' program. The whole idea is to build a sense of community and touch the lives of the kids before they get into gangs."

Visor said he has seen other "divine appointments" this year open channels of outreach between the church and the surrounding community, which is predominantly Hispanic.

Last spring, a devastating hailstorm severely damaged the church and many homes in the area.

"That night after the hailstorm we looked out and saw the patches of light and darkness, and some of our people met in prayer and determined to meet the needs of the people. Next day, we went door to door with food and helped board up broken windows," Visor said.

Since then, with help of outside volunteers, the church has roofed 80 dwellings of elderly, disabled and other uninsured home owners and assisted 250 families with repairs and basic storm assistance.

"Through the hailstorm, God really broke through and got our attention," Visor said. "We had been targeting mass mailings, trying to reach our church field, but the Lord showed us we've got to take care of the people right around the church. Our mission statement is 'To love the Lord our God with all our heart and to love our neighbors as ourselves, across the street and around the world.'"

Average income of families around the church is \$11,000 a year, Visor said. "Since Nov. 2, we have ministered to 152 families."

Under its Mission Fort Worth umbrella, the church is carrying out and planning to begin a number of other ministries.

Undergirding all of the efforts is the church's Upper Room Prayer Ministry staffed by "prayer warriors" 24 hours a day.

Sagamore Hill members currently are:

- beginning ESL (English as a second language), mentoring and tutoring programs.

- operating a Choice Pregnancy Center and a Mission Fort Worth Care Center where financially needy families can get food, clothing and limited financial assistance. While visiting in the homes of these families, church members have opportunity to share Christ's redeeming grace and to learn who their neighbors are.

- conducting Bible studies and Sunday services in two nursing homes, ministering to an average attendance of 170 people in its four apartment ministries and sponsoring the Central Baptist Mission in downtown Fort Worth. The mission, under the direction of pastor Lester Grubbs, conducts the Central Baptist Church Urban Outreach Ministries at a senior citizen low-income center and a low-income government-assisted housing project.

- working via a task force on starting the Mission Fort Worth Language Center, beginning with the 50-plus adults studying English at the elementary school which has run out of space. "Our church facilities are still being repaired after the hailstorm, but we hope to be ready to host the language ministry by Jan. 1," Visor said.

-- planning to begin a widows and homebound ministry, linking people for Bible study via telephone, and praying about beginning a Meals-on-Wheels ministry.

The church has a total Sunday attendance of about 800 at its main campus and its mission centers.

Sagamore Hill also is putting feet to faith with a \$100,000 goal for its December world missions offering.

"Last year, pastor Miller challenged us with the slogan 'Change Can Change the World,' and the Lord enabled us to double our \$50,000 offering goal," Visor said.

"I believe the opportunities we are experiencing are a result of our being obedient to Jesus' Great Commission. I've never been part of something so exciting. To be able to see God work in such a mighty way is incredible."

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McKeever delivers sermons  
from the pulpit & his pen

By Debbie Moore

Baptist Press  
12/4/95

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Joe McKeever is a preacher who doubles as a religious editorial cartoonist, or is it the other way around?

A regular weekly contributor to just about all the Baptist state newspapers and several secular papers across the country, McKeever has been a pastor since 1962. He has served at First Baptist Church, Kenner, La., a suburb of New Orleans, since 1990.

After growing up on a farm in Winston County, Ala., McKeever aspired to be a history professor. He grew up a Methodist ("because that was the only church in town") and attended a Methodist college, Birmingham Southern, where he majored in history and political science. A Christian since age 11, his call to preach came during his senior year of college. The circumstances of that call, along with a few other college experiences, assured him of the sovereignty of God, McKeever said.

"I had never even asked God to reveal his will to me!" he said. "You know God's in charge when you end up doing God's will when the thought of doing God's will hasn't even crossed your mind.

"It all started with a phone call," McKeever said.

"My sister and her husband were moving to Birmingham and invited me to transfer to a local college near them and live with them," he recounted. The offer of free room and board clinched the idea. But then after moving, they had to choose a new church family in the city.

"We all started searching for a church. I wanted small and they wanted large," he said.

"I grew up in a little country church and that was my preference. But my sister and her husband wanted to try a big city church, Westend Baptist in Birmingham, and they owned the car, so that was that," he said.

"I thought all city churches were cold, dead, worldly, formal and too rich," McKeever said. He walked into his first big-city church service, which happened to be a Wednesday night, and dared the church to prove him wrong.

"And they did!" he said. "Not only did the pastor walk back and speak to us personally, but we also were invited to sing in the choir."

His first big-city church experience proved more than positive. Within three years, he was baptized, had met the woman who would become his wife (social worker Margaret Henderson), was called to preach, was married and was ordained.

After completing college, he attended New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where he finished a master of theology degree in church history in 1967 and a doctor of ministry degree in evangelism in 1973.

Thirty-three years later, McKeever has served in four big-city churches. Besides New Orleans, he has been a minister in Charlotte, N.C.; Columbus, Miss.; and Jackson, Miss.

As to the cartooning, "Mom made my little sister and me draw so she could get her work done!" he said.

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"When I went to first grad , oth r kids would gather to watch me draw. To this day, I can outdraw any class of first-graders anywhere!"

His first publication break came in the 1960s when a local newspaper near New Orleans ask him to do a weekly devoti n. As on of his drawings accompanied the writeup on the religion page each Friday, he inadvertently ended up having a free half-page ad for his ministry every week for a few years.

"Somewhere along the way I wondered if my home state Baptist paper (The Alabama Baptist) might be interested in printing my cartoons," he said. In 1969 he sent a few to the secretary to the editor of the paper, the late Hudson Baggett. The secretary, Lee Alys Orr, was a friend of McKeever's during his days at Westend Baptist Church. She showed her boss McKeever's work; Baggett liked it and offered McKeever a weekly spot, paying him \$1.50 per week.

"To me, that was the same as having a new Cadillac in the driveway!" McKeever said. "I really didn't care about the money. I just wanted to have the cartoons in print" because "when you see your work in print, you get a little better idea of what you need to be doing."

McKeever's religious cartoons concern subjects ranging from Christian family life to the effort to tithe to the delivery of sermons.

"Many of the cartoons poke gentle fun at pastors," he admitted.

"A fellow in Oklahoma once wrote to the editor of their (Baptist state) paper, Dick McCartney, and asked, 'What does this McKeever fellow have against preachers?'

"'Nothing,' McCartney replied. "'He is one!'"

More than 250,000 copies of his books of religious cartoons have been sold. These "instant cartoons" are intended to be used for church newsletters. His first foreign ministry endeavor occurred a few years ago when Southern Baptist missionaries in Singapore commissioned him to do a 28-page full-color evangelistic comic book; the 10,000 copies were available on newspaper stands all over that country.

He also produces a special package of cartoons each year to accompany the Baptist Sunday School Board's Winter Bible Study topic. The package on Amos, the 1996 Winter Bible Study topic, is currently available.

Besides McKeever's wit and humor, his pastor's heart is evident in his ministry. Also a father and grandfather, he always has been known to be busy sketching something, and he realizes children have an urge to be doing something too, although they also need to be able to sit quietly sometimes. Therefore he produces a weekly sermon accompaniment just for the children in his church.

A draw-er himself when he's listening to others preach, he encourages his church kids to bring a box of crayons with them to the services.

"The kids and I know something the parents and teachers don't know: You can draw with your hands and eyes and still be listening with your ears and heart."

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(BP) photos and cartoons available as GIF files or as prints upon request from New Orleans Seminary's office of public relations, at CompuServe: 70420,62; phone: (504) 286-3603.

Theft of retirees' tools  
stirs wave of generosity

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press  
12/4/95

McDADE, Texas (BP)--Thieves stole one of Texas Baptist Men Retiree Builders' tool trailers from a church building site in McDade, Texas. But like the Old Testament story of Joseph, what they "meant for evil, God meant for good," according to Bob Dixon, Texas Baptist Men executive director.

Traditionally, the TBM Retiree Builders have worked 10 months out of the year "building for the glory of God" and have taken a break in November and December to be with th ir families for the holidays.

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However, when the retirees learned that fire had destroyed Weeping Willow Baptist Church, a predominantly black congregation east of Austin, they made an exception to the rule.

The builders set up their travel trailers at nearby McDade Baptist Church. Asking only for one hot meal a day and the privilege of leading a revival once the new church was completed, the retirees started to work building a new facility for Weeping Willow.

Their efforts attracted the attention of the Austin American-Statesman, which ran two color photos and a lengthy story headlined, "Race, age aren't issues in McDade church effort."

Unfortunately, they also attracted the attention of thieves. Two nights after that article appeared, someone stole the builders' tool trailer and its contents, valued at more than \$12,000.

The tool trailer was one of four used by TBM Retiree Builders. The trailers and their contents are provided by Texas Baptist gifts to the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions.

Without missing a beat, the builders borrowed a replacement trailer from another TBM Retiree Builders team that had recently completed a church near Fort Worth, and they finished the Weeping Willow church project.

The "rest of the story," Dixon said, is that the theft was reported in the Austin newspaper. That article quoted Olen Miles of Austin, the 89-year-old founder of Retiree Builders, as saying donations could be sent to the offices of Texas Baptist Men in Dallas.

"In the first day's mail after that follow-up story appeared, we received thousands of dollars from all over central Texas -- more than enough to replace the trailer and tools," Dixon said. "And the checks are still coming in."

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