



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

December 19, 1995

95-202

LOS ANGELES--Ethan Allen Thomas Jr. left gang for faith, journalism; dead at 22; photo.

SOUTH CAROLINA--Crime victims need ministry, thus 'Neighbors Who Care.'

KENTUCKY--Pastor takes on police role as crime victims' advocate.

ALABAMA--Church challenges ex-con to 'fill this place up.'

KENTUCKY--Reformed Seminary president underscores lay ministry.

CALIFORNIA--Tomorrow's 'first generation' to be challenged, Crews says.

ARKANSAS--Baptists ponder AIDS ministries amid fear, theological concerns.

TENNESSEE--Church's boys rebuild bicycles as ministry.

ALABAMA--MKs find challenges, blessings in America.

ALABAMA--MKs say to treat them 'like everyone else.'

TENNESSEE--New book addresses issues faced by missionary kids.

Ethan Allen Thomas Jr. left gang  
for faith, journalism; dead at 22 By Keith Beene

Baptist Press  
12/19/95

LOS ANGELES (BP)--Ethan Allen Thomas Jr. desperately wanted to be a journalist. It didn't matter to him that as a black 22-year-old from south-central Los Angeles the odds were against him.

A former gang member and ex-con who had surrendered his life to God, Thomas wore a constant smile that exuded both his confidence and never-wavering pride as a copy messenger at the Los Angeles Times. Everything about the newsroom -- ringing telephones, constant deadlines, stale coffee, reporters pecking out stories on computer terminals -- seemed to energize him.

But on Nov. 17 his name was not printed in a byline atop one of the news stories he was learning to write. Instead, it was among the obituaries.

Cold, unfeeling newspaper type summed up the scant basics. Fatally shot by his estranged wife, Thomas' life was over just as it was about to take off. Still, his accomplishments since being released from prison in 1993 stand as a testament to anyone who thinks stories like his never happen.

In a feature on Thomas in the Los Angeles Times following his death, reporter Patt Morrison wrote:

"We are a leery and skeptical lot, we journalists. Prove it, we say. Show me.

"Yeah, yeah, sure. Gangbanging kid gets out of prison and goes straight. Gives up the street life. Teaches Sunday school. Coaches children's football. Holds down a job, goes to college. Won't have sex before marriage. Right-- tell us another fairy tale.

"But this kid did show us. This kid rounded every base, cleared every hurdle. Three years out of state prison and he just spent a day last week visiting USC, figuring out how long it would take him to get admitted.

"In 10 years' time, maybe less, you would have known about Ethan Allen Thomas Jr., because he would have been telling you himself, through his writing. But now we have to tell you about him, because he is dead."

Thomas recounted his troubled childhood and youth in a first-person article he penned for the July-August 1994 issue of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's MissionsUSA magazine:

--more--

"I can remember the first piece of crack I ever touched, because along with it came the first dishonest dollar I ever made.

"I wanted to go to the fair, but had no money. My mother gave me \$30 to buy crack for her. When I found the local supplier I copped (purchased), doubled (turned a profit) and went to the fair.

"My mother never sent me on crack-buying missions for her again, but because she was caught up in her own addiction, she had unknowingly launched and financed the beginning of my career in drugs."

Searching for the love and acceptance he didn't get at home, Thomas began "running" with the Crips gang. His life became no different than many of the roles glamorized in such Hollywood films as "Boyz 'n the Hood" and "Pulp Fiction." Drugs, carjackings and guns were part of his everyday existence.

Then, as senior in high school, he was charged with attempted murder and incarcerated in California's Soledad Prison for three years. Thomas, who had won a \$150 award in the 11th grade for a composition he wrote, turned to writing to help soothe some of his feelings of helplessness while in prison.

"For the first time writing became a release for me. More than ever, I hungered to be free from what had imprisoned me mentally and physically.

"I cried out to God in search of guidance. Even though I had fallen from the narrow path of a good Christian, on this particular evening in my tiny two-man cell I asked God, 'What is it that you will have me do?'

"Later in my sleep, a single word scrolled across my mind: JOURNALISM."

After being released from prison in 1993, Thomas's life took a turn for the better when he went to visit his parole officer. The parole office had moved, but in its place was a dance studio and someone who would listen. Dance instructor Trena Johnson encouraged Thomas to chase his dream of becoming a journalist.

On a whim, Johnson called the Los Angeles Times and asked an editor to read some of her new friend's writing. The editor agreed to an informal interview over lunch.

Thomas began working as an intern in the features department at the newspaper a short time later. Michael Quintanilla, a Los Angeles Times reporter, was assigned as Thomas' reporter-mentor. Everywhere Quintanilla went, Thomas was to follow. Thomas learned the basics of proper telephone etiquette, worked on conceptualizing stories and even wrote several.

"He was my shadow, and a sponge of a shadow," Quintanilla said. "He soaked up everything and loved it."

Thomas worked hard at being a reporter. Although Thomas often struggled, Quintanilla encouraged him to remember his dream. "I told him, 'If you want the Times bad enough, then you deserve it.'"

The young intern's best work, Quintanilla said, turned out to be about his own neighborhood, and Thomas became important to the staff at the newspaper because his life was what they often wrote about.

Quintanilla felt sorry for Thomas when his 10-week internship ended. Most interns go back to journalism school, but for Thomas that wasn't possible. So, several editors got together and created a part-time position so the fledgling reporter could continue at the newspaper.

Seeing that he would need an education to advance any further at the paper, Thomas began taking classes at Los Angeles's Southwest College, where he edited the school's newspaper. He had plans to enroll in journalism school at the University of Southern California next fall.

According to those who knew Thomas best, his success in school and at the newspaper was a direct result of a dedication and love for the Lord.

Joe Freeman, pastor of Greater Good Shepherd Missionary Baptist Church, said Thomas had attended the church with his grandmother since his early youth. An attentive Sunday school student, Thomas was "seriously interested in what the Bible said," even as a 15-year-old, Freeman said.

Thomas' life changed following a type of "Damascus Road" experience in jail.

As Freeman tells it, Thomas called out of desperation one Saturday shortly after being released from prison. "He said he couldn't stand it. He was going to do som thing," the pastor recalled. "I said, 'What are you going to d ?' Later that day I heard he had broken the law."

Recounted Thomas, "I knew if being 'legit' got too hard I could always revert to my old gang-banging ways. And in one desperate moment I did. For money.

"Arrested for robbery and thrown in the county jail, I began to realize that my life didn't have to be this way. I felt like a loaded gun was pointed at my head. I needed one last chance. I gave myself to God.

"The next morning a miracle happened: I was not recognized in a police line-up and was released from jail. I was ready in my heart and my soul to serve God."

Following his jail-cell conversion, Thomas became an integral part of the ministry at Greater Good Shepherd, located a block from the intersection where riots broke out following the Rodney King verdict in 1992.

Freeman said the church, with Thomas' help, organized a group of "parolees" who met at the church on Saturdays to share their experiences about life on the outside. Thomas became the lead discipler of these young souls.

Thomas also began sharing his testimony with the church youth and taught the older youth each Sunday morning, often exhorting them to learn from his mistakes.

"In all my years as pastor, I have never had a person as committed and d voted to God as Ethan was," Freeman said. "He had a personality that he loved God and was concerned about young lives."

Eugene Bryant, a coordinator for the HMB's black church extension work in south-central Los Angeles, met Thomas for the first time last summer when Thomas was a youth counselor at Camp Emmanuel, a summer program for African American youth Bryant helps direct.

Bryant said he was impressed with Thomas from the start and the two hit it off. In a sense, Thomas became Bryant's apprentice.

"He told his testimony during church service (at camp)," Bryant said. "He was really committed and a really disciplined Bible reader. He shared his faith with everyone."

Bryant said Thomas taught the same discipline to the youth of his church. Acting as a kind of volunteer youth minister at Greater Good Shepherd, Thomas tried to learn everything he could about youth ministry from Bryant, a former youth minister. Bryant said he saw a lot of the same thirst for spiritual knowledge and love of youth in Thomas that he had as a young minister.

"I told him he could call me at any time, and he did," Bryant said. "He'd call at 11 'clock at night, because he worked at night, and say 'Hey, Rev., I've been r ading the Bible and I have a question ... .'"

During the summer camp, Thomas was exposed to Bible drill for the first time. Under Bryant's leadership, Thomas instituted Bible drill at Greater Good Shepherd and was planning to take a team to the youth evangelism conference in 1996.

According to Bryant, Thomas and his wife, Kelly, had become estranged in recent months. Kelly, who had two small children from a previous relationship, was from the same neighborhood. The two had been married since October 1994. Their youth, financial insecurities and possibly Thomas's reluctance to cut back his responsibilities at school, the newspaper and church may have all contributed to the tragic result.

Bryant said he had counseled them in the last several weeks and according to published reports Thomas was moving out of their apartment when he was shot.

Bryant said he believes Kelly feared losing Ethan and this was her "last act of desperation."

In the end, Thomas's story sounds like something from a Shakespearean tragedy: God-fearing ex-gang member rises above impoverished, ghetto roots, only to be gunned down by the same senseless violence h was trying to escape.

When news of Thomas' death reached the bustling newsroom of the Los Angeles Times, reporters normally hardened to news of death and crime had to sit down and shake their heads in disbelief. In the same feature that looked at Thomas's career at the newspaper, reporter Morrison remembered, "Ethan was the kind of kid we all like to have around, because his doing well makes us feel so good. But Ethan was his own achievement, and his greatest struggle. And his best story was the one he never wrote -- about himself."

The final paragraphs of Thomas' own MissionsUSA story serve as a fitting epitaph for one who stood as a beacon in the midst of the desolation and decay of south-central Los Angeles:

"When I look back on my horrific past I am not angry or bereaved. I am thankful to God that my little brothers are not traveling that path. I am thankful that my mother has found the Lord and that he has given her the strength and guidance to raise my two little brothers -- handsome 8- and 10-year-olds.

"I thank God for rescuing me and for restoring my faith.

"Now I can thank Jesus for my past, because I know that God is merciful."

--30--

(BP) photo being secured at press time. Check in SBCNet News Room after Dec. 20 or with BP central office in Nashville, Tenn. Beene is a free-lance writer in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Crime victims need ministry,  
thus 'Neighbors Who Care'

By Clay Renick

Baptist Press  
12/19/95

LEXINGTON, S.C. (BP)--One family was training to help survivors of crime as another couple was about to lose a husband -- to murder.

Paul and Cora Scott, members of First Baptist Church, Columbia, S.C., heard about a new program called Neighbors Who Care started by Prison Fellowship, an interdenominational prison ministry based in suburban Washington.

The Scotts had experienced the criminal system as victims. Paul had been robbed before, and Cora went through sexual abuse as a child.

Not long after their Neighbors group formed in Lexington County, the murder happened.

Bill Swartz was driving home with his 3-year-old daughter, Ashley, when they saw a strange car outside their house.

Swartz told his daughter to stay down while he checked it out. But a gunman inside the car fired at Swartz, killing the 33-year-old father.

Local police caught the suspect. But Swartz's widow, Lisa, was afraid to live at the house alone.

The Scotts were among those in the Neighbors group who responded to the Swartz family's trauma.

They cleaned the home, repaired the back door and even sent 20 volunteers to install about 800 feet of chain-link fence. The local sheriff's department supplied a puppy for the family.

"A lot of times the victim's family is just forgotten about," said Lisa Swartz. "They made it a lot safer feeling for me."

"This is a new area of ministry for the church," added Lisa Barnes, executive director of Neighbors Who Care. "To really deal with crime, you must deal with the wounds."

Prison Fellowship started the program several years ago and used a Southern Baptist church in Montgomery, Ala., as the test site.

Such a ministry, it turned out, was greatly needed.

One woman had just gotten out of colon surgery when a neighbor broke into her mobile home and raped her.

"She wasn't able to cope with this," said Carla Hammonds, NWC director in Montgomery.

--more--

Hammonds sent volunteers to offer counseling and walk d the woman through the l gal system.

The volunteers go through a 12-hour training course about the damage from crime and the process of listening.

Nearly two dozen churches help the ministry with prayer, financial support and volunteers. They average 170 cases a month. Local police provide information about the crime victims.

"We have a good relationship with the Montgomery Baptist Association," Hammonds added.

Hammonds' group writes a letter to each victim and seeks to follow up with a call offering such helps as house repairs, advice on social services and plenty of listening.

One victim was a Christian with a blind husband. They found their home in shambles with food and new school clothes missing. And the woman knew the young people who did it.

"She felt it was wrong for her to be mad," Hammonds said. "Anger is part of the h aling process that God has given us."

The Montgomery group uses 35 telephone volunteers and five men for repair work. A local company donates free glass. The repair team also installs free dead-bolt locks and peep holes.

Hammonds was explaining the program to a Sunday school class recently, when one of the members looked visibly upset. He had been tied up, gagged and robbed at gun point.

The crime left him overwhelmed, "just a nervous wreck," Hammonds said.

An NWC volunteer started a counseling session for the man, who hadn't known help was available.

The U.S. Justice Department took a look at crime in the United States, publishing its findings in a "Report on Crime and Justice," including some predictions based on current trends.

The report claims one third of all households will be victims of break-ins in the next 20 years. NWC volunteers already see the effects.

One woman in Lancaster, Pa., for example, called victim assistance through the police department. Her husband tried to kill her and was put in prison.

She was left with a son and no driver's license or job. NWC volunteers helped her find local employment and the encouragement to continue.

"It was the church being there at a point of crisis," Barnes said. "A lot of victims don't have that."

Volunteers in Denver who started an NWC chapter and among their police referrals was an elderly woman who was robbed and had become depressed and wanted to commit suicide.

But the NWC volunteers talked her out of it.

"She attributes her life now to Neighbors," Barnes said. "We have a great opportunity to share the love of Christ."

Over in Lexington, S.C., Lisa Swartz can relate to that. Her husband's death left her with an appreciation for victim support. She even wants to join the local effort.

"I don't think I could have come this far without them," she said.

--30--

Further information about Neighbors Who Care is available from 1-800-NWC-7770.

**Pastor takes on police role  
as crime victims' advocate**      **By Joyce Sweeney Martin**

SOMERSET, Ky. (BP)--Pastor Jimmy McKinney may have traded his suit and tie for a policeman's uniform, but he hasn't left the ministry.

McKinney, who has been a pastor for 23 years, became the director of the Victim of Crime Act program for the Somerset, Ky., police department in October. The federally funded program, begun in 1984, awards grant money to agencies working with victims of crimes against the person.

In his new position as a sworn officer of the law, McKinney will be a "full-time advocate for crime victims and their families who all too often are forgotten by the judicial system," according to David Gilbert, Somerset chief of police.

It is these "living victims" on whom McKinney will concentrate.

"My focus has changed, but I'm still in the ministry," the former pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, Eubank, Ky., said.

Rather than coming on the scene when things are more stable as he often did in his years as a pastor, McKinney will enter as soon after the moment of crisis as possible. His goal will be to contact each victim of a "crime against person, not property" within 24 hours of the crime. He will direct the victim to medical, legal and social service agencies for assistance.

And he will remain personally involved as each case winds its way through the legal system. He will sit with the victim and/or family during court hearings. He will assist the victim and/or family should the perpetrator of the crime come up for parole. He will recruit volunteers to be advocates as well.

Although the Victim of Crime Act funds more than 50 victim advocacy programs across Kentucky, Somerset is the only place which devotes one officer to investigating every report of a violent crime against a person and then providing an advocate throughout the judicial process, Gilbert said.

Police have been "extremely positive" toward McKinney and the advocacy program, he said.

McKinney already had established credibility with the officers by serving as volunteer chaplain during the last two years, according to Gilbert. As chaplain, McKinney rode at least 500 hours with officers. He taught classes for officers' spouses on how to deal with the stresses of police life. He accompanied officers who delivered death notices. Twice he was called on to assist the SWAT team in hostage negotiations.

And now, McKinney is one of the officers. He trained at the police academy in Richmond, Ky., where there was "nothing different in my training from that of a line officer," he said. He has full police powers and authority to make an arrest.

His jurisdiction is the same as any other Somerset officer. Any victim of a crime in Somerset will be his responsibility. Although the population of the town is only 12,000, more than 4 million visitors come to nearby Lake Cumberland each year, increasing the crime potential dramatically, Gilbert noted.

And although McKinney's years as a pastor and his professional degree in counseling will serve him well in his role as an advocate, he knows he is now "first and foremost a peace officer. My first responsibility is to protect the public and save lives."

"That," he said, "is not inconsistent at all with what the church is called to do."

--30--

**Church challenges ex-conv  
to 'fill this place up'**

**By Rebecca Day**

**Baptist Press  
12/19/95**

URIAH, Ala. (BP)--John Sparks has been a free man only four years.

The new pastor of First Baptist Church, Uriah, Ala., spent 14 years in the state's prison system and was released early for good behavior in 1991.

--more--

Sparks acknowledged his earlier years were not happy ones. "Everything I ever tried to do failed. I lost my marriage, my family, jobs," he said.

Involved in drugs, alcohol and pornography, his life in a downward spiral, Sparks was convicted of second-degree murder in 1977. In prison, he began reading a little red Bible sent by his grandmother. "I found 2 Corinthians 5:17," he said, "which says, '... if any man be in Christ he is a new creation; old things are passed away; all things become new.'"

"I realized that I couldn't change anything, but Jesus could."

Sparks began studying the Bible and volunteering to assist the prison chaplains. He also earned a diploma in pastoral ministries.

The day he was released from prison, Sparks joined Carrville Baptist Church in Tallahassee, Ala. Soon after being ordained as a minister, he began an evangelistic ministry, traveling to churches across Alabama sharing his testimony of God's power to change lives.

Since then, he has served on staff at two Tallahassee churches: as youth minister at Elam Baptist and pastor of River Road Baptist. Sparks married his wife, Donna, whom he began corresponding with while in prison, in 1987. Their son, Price, was born in 1993.

When Elam Baptist called him as youth minister in 1993, Sparks said, "I didn't think I would be accepted (as a minister)." However, "I knew God had a place for me to serve. He doesn't call anyone to sit on a pew and not serve."

Sparks noted both worship and Sunday school attendance increased at River Road during his pastorate. The church also began an alcohol and drug ministry during that time.

Sparks began his service at First Baptist, Uriah, Nov. 6, succeeding pastor Paul Campbell. Although the men never met, Campbell was a corrections counselor for the Alabama prison system.

The Uriah church, located about 20 miles from a prison where Sparks was confined, is excited about Sparks' ministry. "We just knew (Sparks) was the man," said Larry Boles, who chaired the church's pastor search committee.

"He's on fire for the Lord. He has so much love, having been forgiven so much," Boles said. "I believe he's really going to fill this place up."

"One thing I've learned in the ministry," Sparks said, "is that there's not a shortage of lost people. We can't assume that the church around the corner is going to share the gospel. We have to do it ourselves."

--30--

Reformed Seminary president  
underscores lay ministry

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press  
12/19/95

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Ministers who fail to take seriously the ministry of laypeople do so at the peril of the church of Jesus Christ, an evangelical seminary president told December graduates of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"I'm here to remind you not only of the noble call that is yours as ministers in the church but to remind you that in your specialized training and calling God asks you to join with all those to whom he gives responsibility for ministry in the church," said Luder G. Whitlock, president of Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Miss. He urged graduates to commit themselves "to the training, the education and development of those laypeople for whom and on whom the future of the church is dependent."

Whitlock, an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America, addressed 159 graduates who received master's and doctoral degrees at the Louisville, Ky., seminary's 176th commencement Dec. 15.

--more--

In his address, Whitlock said the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians "makes it plain that each believer is called to ministry." Church reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin also emphasized the importance of lay ministry, Whitlock said.

"One of the reasons for the strength and vibrant expansion of the church in this country undoubtedly was tied to the involvement of the laity, and nowhere was that seen more powerfully than among Baptists here in the South," Whitlock said. "The tragedy in recent years in many of the churches in our country is that we have forgotten our heritage and forgotten much of the truth of Scripture. We have ignored the importance of the average believer and the responsibility of the average church member to join with us in ministry."

Whitlock attributed much of the decline of lay ministry to the proliferation of large churches. He noted 15 percent or less of the churches in the Southern Baptist Convention contain half the denomination's membership.

"One of the things that happens in an urban world filled with big churches is that you have congregations that tend to be led by pastors and by staff," he said. "It happens not only in the Southern Baptist Convention but among other groups as well."

In today's world, the morals of church and unchurched people are hard to distinguish, Whitlock observed. He said pollster George Gallup has consistently found this to be the case in his surveys. The lack of moral vision by Christians stems from their not understanding "the truth of God's Word and the implications of that Word for human behavior," he said, emphasizing that ministers bear the burden of teaching laypeople the truth of Scripture.

"We can celebrate the call God gives us to serve his church and to bring glory to him, making people aware of how good and great he is and the truth and the power of the gospel," Whitlock said. "But if we fail, we shall be held responsible."

In a separate ceremony the same day, Boyce Bible School, a division of Southern Baptist Seminary that trains non-college graduates, granted 10 associate of arts degrees and 23 diplomas and certificates. Commencement speaker for the Boyce graduation was Paul W. Powell, president of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board.

--30--

Tomorrow's 'first generation'  
to be challenged, Crews says

By Scott Valentine

Baptist Press  
12/19/95

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--Citing the graduating class' theme, "Leading into Tomorrow," at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, President William O. Crews noted, "Those who will minister in the future will be the first generation of a new tomorrow. You face some of the greatest opportunities of challenge there have ever been. Forces will try to pull you away from effective leadership and ministry, but don't let anything pull you away from God."

Effective leadership must be tied closely with obedience to God, Crews told graduating students of the Mill Valley, Calif., seminary.

The seminary awarded 63 degrees to students representing 10 nationalities and 12 states at winter commencement ceremonies Dec. 15.

Speaking to graduating students from three of its regional campuses and various Ethnic Leadership Development centers throughout the western United States, Crews used the Old Testament story of Enoch, who "walked with God" and was later "taken up" to heaven, to emphasize the importance of following God.

"Leadership, however well you do it, will not benefit apart from God," said Crews, president of the seminary since 1986. "We have trained you as best we can ... We hope we have given you a desire to search for God."

Commencement ceremonies also featured testimonies from various graduates. Each stressed the importance relationships in shaping their seminary experience and ministry.

Golden Gate Seminary is one of six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries and the only SBC agency in the western United States.

--30--

**Baptists ponder AIDS ministries  
amid fear, theological concerns** By Russell N. Dilday

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--When Eric Camp was diagnosed with AIDS in 1992, he did what many Southern Baptists would do -- he turned to a pastor.

"I needed to tell my parents. It was one of my first concerns," Camp said. "So, one of the first phone calls I made was to Rich Kincl," pastor of Camp's home congregation, Central Baptist Church, Magnolia, Ark. "My concern was when I told my parents that he be prepared."

Kincl's response, Camp said, was "a very compassionate, supporting, loving conversation. He let me know he would be there for my family."

When Camp, of Springdale, Ark., was told he was HIV-positive, "My immediate reaction was, 'I'm going to die a slow, painful, socially unacceptable death.'"

His next thought, he said, was the decision of "who to tell and how to tell them." Among the first persons he told was an AIDS activist. After the conversation, he said, "I knew that above anything else, I could make a difference with what time I had left: educating schools, churches and clubs on prevention, compassion with those who have the virus and letting them know you don't have to be afraid of a person with AIDS."

Camp found an education outlet through the Regional Aids Interfaith Network (RAIN), a not-for-profit group that provides education programs and ministers to people with AIDS.

When Camp told his parents, their reaction also was typical of many Southern Baptists. "Mom and Pop kept everything pretty quiet the first year. There are many in the church who have never talked to them about it, but mainly because they don't know how to talk about it."

Many Baptists who deal with the trauma of AIDS cite fear and the transmittal of the disease through homosexual or promiscuous heterosexual intercourse as reasons Baptists "keep quiet" in dealing with infected people and their families. Arkansas Department of Health AIDS Surveillance Program figures confirm the prevalence of transmission through homosexual and heterosexual intercourse.

Through Nov. 12, a total of 3,380 Arkansans had been reported as HIV-positive. HIV is the virus which causes AIDS, an incurable disease which attacks the body's immune system. Of the total, 50 percent were identified as having contracted the disease through male-to-male sexual contact. An additional 7 percent contracted AIDS through a combination of male-to-male sex and injection drug use. Other transmission factors include injection drug use only (15 percent) and heterosexual intercourse (14 percent).

Camp contracted AIDS through homosexual involvement. He admitted wrestling with the issue of homosexuality throughout his life. "I knew before puberty I was gay, and being a Christian raised in a Southern Baptist church and a strong Southern Baptist family, I also knew this was an abomination and a separation from God." Insisting "I did everything I could to change," Camp said his struggle with his sexuality led him to attempt suicide twice.

Tommy Goode, an Arkansas Baptist missions associate, said the issue of homosexuality is one of the two most significant factors contributing to Baptist hesitancy to minister to people with AIDS. "One is the fear of the contagion of the virus and having physical contact or exposing people we love to somebody who has that virus," he said. "It is a fearful thing. Regardless of what reports say, there is still a concern people have, that 'we still might be able to catch this virus.'"

"The other is the repulsion that most heterosexuals feel toward the homosexual lifestyle," Goode said. "You compound that with the biblical teaching against homosexuality and you have two factors there, the fear of a deadly disease and the fear of a deadly lifestyle, which most average people, including Arkansas Baptists, are almost unable to overcome in order to reach out and do ministry."

Goode said he believes Baptist ministries to people with AIDS will increase, "and this is how we will do it: God will and is calling very specially gifted people to reach out in ministry and is empowering them in such a way that they overcome their fear and wall of prejudice and are ministering simply in Jesus' name.

"We need to affirm those people, help them, train them and embrace what God is doing with them and let that be a ministry in their churches," he urged.

Ray Higgins, pastor of Second Baptist Church, Little Rock, and former professor of Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Texas, said in working with the homosexual community in any ministry, "we need to avoid two mistakes."

"On the one hand we should not be so against a behavior we believe the Bible calls sin that we cannot love and we end up even hating and cannot minister to those people who embody that characteristic," he said. "On the other hand, we should avoid rationalizing or excusing behaviors that the Bible describes as sin.

"There's an idea that you have to point out people's sins to them as you minister to them and that's true," Higgins added. "But the more you stick sin in people's faces, the more difficult it makes it to minister to them. And we are not consistent with the way we relate to people. Everyone in our congregations is a sinner, including the pastor. But what we do is choose pet sins that we talk about and condemn, and we sweep under the rug a Bible full of sins that we excuse or that hit closer to home."

Camp said that as a homosexual with AIDS, "what I would expect from Christians is a Christlike response. Look at how Christ treated lepers, a misunderstood disease the religious leaders of the time said was the judgment of God." Like those with AIDS, he said, "lepers were a socially ostracized group of people who were ill and needed the love of God more than many others in society. Christ rebuked the religious leaders of the time and reached out and healed lepers."

One way Southern Baptists are ministering to people with AIDS is through the Woman's Missionary Union national 1996 Project HELP emphasis, which focuses on AIDS. Planners say the project's goal is for participants to share the gospel while meeting physical and spiritual needs of those affected by AIDS. The plan involves education, personal involvement and a day set aside to collect resources and money for AIDS ministries.

Trudy Smith, 1996 Project HELP coordinator for Arkansas, agreed with Goode that Baptists must go beyond preconceptions and fear to minister to those with AIDS. Noting messengers to annual Arkansas Baptist meetings have adopted numerous resolutions opposing homosexuality in recent years, Smith voiced concern such efforts "only broaden the gap between us and a community we need to be reaching."

Smith, a registered nurse and member of Little Rock's Immanuel Baptist Church, cautioned Baptists not to ignore the AIDS epidemic. "By and large, we are not a congregation at high risk, so it really hasn't been in our face. But it's going to be."

Trudy James, executive director of RAIN, said rejection is a major concern for people with AIDS. "When they are sick, they are often treated as outcasts," she said. "As religious people, especially as followers of Jesus, the model for us is very clear. Jesus ate with those who others were afraid to eat with; Jesus touched those others would not touch. Jesus told us to love one another."

Part of RAIN's mission is to train and implement "careteams," church-based groups that "adopt" a person with AIDS as their "carepartner."

"The people on our careteams are courageous and loving people," James declared, "and they really make a difference in the lives of those who are ill and in the lives of their loved ones.

"They do simple things," she explained. "But because the team members come from churches, those simple things bring the message that God loves the person with AIDS and their family."

James said of the 123 RAIN careteams active in Arkansas, only five are Southern Baptist. The first Southern Baptist careteam in the state, from Second Baptist in Little Rock, began ministering in 1991.

Second Baptist team member Ira Hocut said his team b came involv d because "every soul has to have some hope and, if there's anything we Baptists hate most, I feel it's seeing people without hope."

One result of the team's efforts was that participants "had shared enough to see our carepartner baptized at our church before he passed away," Hocut said.

Describing the spiritual impact of ministry to people with AIDS, Camp said, "I've learned that in the absence of effective treatments ... a spiritual life is critical."

He said a recent visit to speak at a Baptist church changed his perspective about his illness. "Because of the love of God in their hearts and the need to reach out to those in need, I felt the love of God in that room like I had not felt since a child in my hometown church," Camp shared.

"It put me on a course that I am not a person dying of AIDS, but one who lives with it," he said. "I thank God for another day. I've got a long ways still to go ... but I don't have the fear of death, which makes life a lot better."

--30--

### Church's boys rebuild bicycles as ministry

By Tim Bearden

Baptist Press  
12/19/95

OLD HICKORY, Tenn. (BP)--What began as a summer activity to help keep Royal Ambassadors busy has turned into a ministry.

In 1994, while most RA programs had shut down for the summer, Steve Burnett, Todd Cole and other RA counselors of Tulip Grove Baptist Church, Old Hickory, Tenn., began searching for an activity to keep boys in grades one through six "busy."

The solution was to dismantle two old bicycles and, using the parts from both, reassemble one bike.

Although no one realized it at the time, that was the beginning of a continuing mission project for the men and boys. Since that summer, 82 bikes have been rebuilt and given to children who otherwise would not have had a bike.

One might think rebuilt bikes look "rebuilt." After all, boys do the rebuilding. And besides, how much rebuilding can be done to an old worn-out bike? Plenty, it turns out.

Last year when bikes were taken to the Nashville Baptist Association Toy Store before Christmas, no one could tell the difference between the seven rebuilt bikes and one new bike that had been donated. The Toy Store is a ministry that provides new toys and gifts to low-income families in Nashville.

According to Steve York, Tulip Grove Brotherhood director, RAs is one of the strongest ministries among the men and boys of the church, fueled by a constant awareness of the bike ministry encompassing 30 to 40 boys and 15 men who make up the RA program.

"Other (ministries) happen but this is hands-on missions for our boys," York says. Men visit "the Barn" on the church grounds often out of curiosity to see how the work is going. Men on visitation have told about the bike project as a way to get other boys involved in church, he adds.

The process of rebuilding the bikes has become an assembly line. Different groups of boys work in the Barn each week so that all have an opportunity during the month to participate. Old bikes come from many different sources including church members, people in the community, a local landfill where the sanitation workers save them for pickup and a sister church.

On a Wednesday night four bikes can be torn down, serial numbers written down and each bike's parts boxed separately.

Burnett, one of the two primary leaders in the project, says it is a learning experience for all the boys. The Lads, in grades one through three, need close guidance as they work to dismantle the bikes, but by the time the boys are in Crusaders, grades four through six, they need little direction.

--more--

After dismantling and inventory, the bike frames are sent to a local metal strip company which donates its time to strip all the old paint and sand any rough spots. Cole, the other primary worker, skillfully guides the repainting process. Bikes are reassembled usually with new rims, tires, pedals, even decals. Finding the new parts is sometimes a tricky process, but Burnett says, "There has not been a time when we needed anything. The Lord has provided."

Aluminum cans are collected and recycled to help cover the costs for the painting and new parts. They also have one church member sponsor. Burnett and Cole scan the want ads and flea markets for parts. While contact with bike manufacturers in Tennessee has not been successful, other sources for parts come through miraculously at the right time.

After each bike is assembled, it is test "driven" around the church parking lot by a professional rider (one of the RAs). Even the test ride becomes an outreach as boys of the community become curious. With the final inspection bikes are ready for distribution. That's the easy part, according to Burnett.

Eight bikes were taken to the Toy Store last year. That number rose to 22 this year. Numerous others were given out throughout the year as needs were discovered.

As funds are available a few new bikes are purchased to fill special requests. Even schoolteachers have called asking for bikes for their students whose families cannot afford them. The teachers found out about the bikes from RAs who were talking about the ministry in their classes. The only requirement for a bike is that there is a real need.

Fifteen RAs helped deliver the bikes to the Nashville Toy Store this year, an event meaningful to both men and boys.

According to York, "anyone who gets involved is changed. These boys are no exception."

"Children have to see more than a picture in a book" to understand missions, York says. The boys begin to understand the good they can do. In the words of the leader, "It sure beats video games."

--30--

MKs find challenges,  
blessings in America

By Keith Hinson

Baptist Press  
12/19/95

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Philip Bedsole remembers being astounded at being able to choose from 10 brands of peanut butter in an American supermarket. In Ethiopia, where he was born to missionary parents, the grocery choices were limited.

"It shocked me the hundreds of different products (in American stores)," said Bedsole, 21, now a fourth-year student at Auburn University in Alabama. "It was strange just the different things -- the many, many things -- that they had here."

Like Bedsole, most "missionary kids," or MKs, have stories about adjusting to life in America. Even though MKs live mostly "on the mission field" while growing up, they do come to the United States:

-- during their parents' furloughs every few years, and

-- often when they finish high school to attend an American university or college.

Eric Sexton, 18, a freshman at the University of Alabama, lived in America until he was age 12 when his parents were appointed as missionaries. The Sextons moved to Costa Rica for training in the Spanish language and then located in Uruguay.

Unlike some MKs -- who are either born in other countries or move abroad at a much younger age -- Sexton didn't find American life so strange when he returned to the States during his 10th-grade year while his parents were on furlough.

But scarcely two years later, when he came through the Miami airport on his way to college, Sexton said he was surprised by what happened in the men's room.

--more--

"The rest rooms flushed automatically, and the sinks came on automatically," he recalled. "That was quite a shock for me. I had never seen anything like that before." Some of the adjustments MKs must make to life in America are often more challenging than simply adjusting to new technology and a wider range of consumer choices.

Forming relationships in America with new friends can be a new and difficult experience.

Bedsole, who attended high school at a boarding school in Kenya, said MKs often form friendships quickly.

"It's a totally different approach to making friends. In high school, we were thrown together in the same situation, and we made friends really fast. Here they take it really slow, and it takes a long time to make friends. Over there, you make bonds really fast," said Bedsole, who is majoring in international business.

Rebeca Mann, 21, a senior at Samford University in Alabama, remembers coming to America from Mexico during her seventh-grade year for her parents' furlough. She feared moving to America and "making friends and then knowing that in less than a year I was going to leave them. It was really hard to leave because we did have a very good youth group. I hated the fact that I had to break away from that."

Even dating can be different from culture to culture, Bedsole noted, since in Africa his city had only two movie theaters, which often showed 40-year-old films. In America, Bedsole noted, the choices for where to take a date are many -- not only theaters but restaurants.

Roxanna Eaton, a former MK who is now 32, remembers visits to American restaurants as sometimes troubling.

"Ordering in a fast-food restaurant is very stressful to an MK. You need someone to hold your hand through it. I used to not like to go to McDonald's until I learned how to order," said Eaton, who is a professional counselor in Richmond, Va., and a volunteer in the family ministries section of the Foreign Mission Board.

Eaton's department routinely works with MKs in counseling and other types of support. Her work with the FMB brings her into contact with MKs by telephone and in person.

Some issues facing MKs, Eaton said, are the same as "any college kid or high school kid is struggling with ... family issues, drugs and alcohol. Most of those things are just the symptoms."

Other counseling issues are peculiar to MKs, Eaton noted, such as their often negative responses to American materialism. "Still to this day, I struggle with that, and I've been back in the States 14 years," she said. "Americans tend to want to live with the most they can have, but you see others (in other countries) living with even less."

Sexton, also, noted the stark contrast between what Americans own versus what people in other countries have. "What I have here would be rather modest in the United States, but I guess I would look pretty rich down there (in Uruguay)," said Sexton, who is planning a double major in political science and telecommunications and film. Mann remembers responding emotionally to the relatively plentiful resources of Americans and American churches.

"That's an area where God changed my attitude," said Mann, who finds it easier now to cope with and appreciate American church life.

When she first arrived, Mann said, "I was most shocked by American churches and how I felt they were very superficial and hypocritical. I just couldn't understand why people who had so much and had so many opportunities to praise God in worship -- and just take advantage of all that -- couldn't have as great a faith on fire like the church I'd been to in Mexico where they'd had nothing (materially)."

But Mann noted her reaction wasn't much different from other MKs. "Some of them target the churches as being very different and see that the churches are more materialistic," she said, "but I do want to stress that the experience an MK has with a church is what the MK makes of it."

"My relationship to my church has been one of the biggest blessings in my life during my time here," said Mann, who is a member of Brookwood Baptist Church in the Birmingham Baptist Association. "All I've had are good experiences with churches in America."

Still, Mann does have concerns about churches that build too many buildings. Church recreation buildings, for example, "do have a ministry, but how many of those buildings are actually being used?" Mann asked. "I've been to so many churches where nobody goes to work out. It seems like it's just sitting there, but they'll have fellowships in it, but could've had a fellowship in some other room."

Another trouble spot for some MKs is language. Virtually all of them speak English but often find it challenging to understand American expressions and idioms. "I sometimes don't understand the American humor," said Mann. "People will crack a joke, and I won't get it. Sometimes that puts me in an uncomfortable position. I've just learned to ask what it means and not to worry about what other people think."

Charlene J. Gray, a former MK who has written a book about MKs, remembers the painfulness of American attempts to be humorous with her. "As an east African MK, the standard question people asked me after I mentioned Africa was, 'Did you ever see Tarzan?' At first, it was amusing, but it began to wear thin on me," wrote Gray in *Children of the Call: Issues Missionaries' Kids Face* (Birmingham: New Hope Publishing, 1995).

In her book, Gray relates the experience of one missionary who was baffled by a phrase spoken at an American supermarket checkout stand. The cashier asked, "Paper or plastic?" The missionary, wrote Gray, "stood there paralyzed until she reached in her wallet and pulled out some cash (paper), and with the other hand pulled out her credit card (plastic)."

Bedsole remembers being puzzled by Southern ways of speaking. "Everybody would say, 'Hi, how y'all doing?'" he said. "I was always asking them what they were saying. That was when I first came back from high school, and people would ask me, 'Where are you from? You talk funny.'"

But Bedsole was thinking the same thing about them.

--30--

MKs say to treat them  
'like everyone else'

By Keith Hinson

Baptist Press  
12/19/95

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--How should churches treat the "missionary kids" -- MKs -- who come their way?

"For me, the most important thing is to be included and to be treated like everyone else," said Eric Sexton, a freshman at the University of Alabama whose parents are missionaries to Uruguay.

"When you first get back (to the United States), I think the initial desire for most MKs is just to be accepted," Sexton said. "There's such a big deal about MKs being special -- and they are -- but I think they want to be treated like everyone else."

Rebeca Mann, a senior at Samford University in Alabama whose parents are missionaries in Mexico, urges churches and Baptist associations to view MKs as helpful to missions education.

"I think they should see that resource they have and just completely take advantage of it and use the MK as much as they can to promote missions," Mann stated. "MKs are more than willing to speak about their experience and to promote things like that."

Philip Bedsole, a fourth-year international business major at Auburn University in Alabama whose parents recently retired as missionaries to Ethiopia, said the attitudes of churches toward MKs is important.

"If I go to a church and the people there welcome you and have strong friendships and show love and kindness, that really attracts me to the church," Bedsole said.

--more--

MKs say churches in America are often quite different than churches on the mission field. Bedsole, who grew up in Africa, remembers African Christians "as really musical. In Africa, if someone is singing, they'll be swaying, and they'll get into the worship."

One thing Bedsole prefers about American worship is the time factor. "I like the services here, because it lasts about an hour. Services at the Ethiopian churches would last all day -- five to six hours. They would get into it and keep going and going. I love the Lord as much as the next man, but I don't think I could stay in the church for six hours," he said.

Many present missionaries with the Foreign Mission Board grew up as MKs, and the current crop of MKs seems open to the possibilities of lives as missionaries.

"I would love to be a missionary," Bedsole said. "If God calls me to be a missionary, I would go in the snap of a finger. I personally think it would be better to raise a family overseas ... . Where I grew up, we never had TV until sixth grade. (We weren't exposed to) all the violence, even all the talk shows and all the stuff they put on TV that they portray as normal, like people sleeping together and they're not married."

Mann said she plans to become a missionary, but wasn't always willing to do so. During one summer as a teen-ager, she returned from the mission field in Mexico for a stay with her grandmother in Texas. Mann attended a church that asked her to go along with them as a translator on a mission trip to Mexico.

"That was the last thing I wanted to do," she said. "But on that mission trip, it was then I realized that God had called me to work with people my own age ... . When I went back to Mexico after that summer, I went back with a completely different perspective."

A key way churches can minister to MKs is by praying for them. Some suggestions on how churches should pray include:

-- "Pray that they would keep their lives focused on Jesus. There are so many distractions. It's really hard to come back here and continue to have a strong Christian walk." -- Philip Bedsole.

-- "Pray for the MKs to realize that God is the only source of happiness they can find. Pray that they would realize the fullness of God." -- Rebeca Mann.

-- "Pray for their adjustment to school life. Pray for them to be able to deal with the separation from their parents, and ... to maintain a healthy balance of respect for their missionary culture as well as their new culture." -- Beverly Miller, executive director of the Alabama Woman's Missionary Union.

-- "Pray that they are able to quickly find where they stand with God for themselves and not to either reject or depend on the relationship they had with God through their parents." -- Roxanna Eaton, a former MK and now a licensed professional counselor who volunteers to counsel MKs for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, based in Richmond, Va.

--30--

New book addresses issues  
faced by missionary kids

By Keith Hinson

Baptist Press  
12/19/95

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Charlene J. Gray remembers coming to America and feeling a bit irritated by some people's questions about her life as a "missionary kid," or MK.

"As an east African MK, the standard question people asked me ... was, 'Did you ever see Tarzan?' At first it was amusing, but it began to wear thin on me," writes Gray in her new book, "Children of the Call: Issues Missionaries' Kids Face" (Birmingham: New Hope, 1995).

Gray, who was born in Tanzania to missionaries Earl and Jane Martin, says she wrote the book to help churches better understand and minister to missionary families -- and especially MKs.

--more--

American Christians sometimes overlook the cultural challenges faced by MKs who come to the United States to attend college, notes Gray, who lives in Nashville, Tenn., with her husband, Brad, who also grew up an MK.

Gray came to the States in 1974 and worked at a fast-food restaurant for a few months before she enrolled at the University of Tennessee.

"It was the first time I had worked at a real job. I requested when I was employed that I not be put up front: taking orders and handling money. I did not want to have to make decisions about currency that was very foreign to me. That was my coping mechanism," recalls Gray, who is a graduate of UT and of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

During the past two decades, Gray has spoken at numerous events and retreats for MKs, and she tells some of their stories in her book.

Gray quotes Jeff Fray, an MK from Africa who visited relatives in Texas: "One of (my cousin's) friends came by and picked us up in his Z28 Camaro. ... This one hot rod would burn up a month of gas rations in Zimbabwe in half a day. He drove this speed machine to McDonald's, which we proceeded to circle for the next hour. Other teenagers were engaged in this strange ritual. I was clueless as to what they got out of it."

For most MKs, the American preoccupation with possessions is a major adjustment, Gray suggests. "The focus in America is so much more on materialism. You're gauged on who you are and what you have."

MKs often see American churches as affected by materialism. "It's still the number one issue for MKs," Gray states. "How do you fit into a church when you've seen church without all the trappings?"

It often seems to MKs that American churches feel they must have certain programs, books and resources to have an effective ministry, Gray says. She suggests some MKs see American churches as having lost sight of what is truly essential.

"It's really a struggle to go to church here in the States. I see church practices that don't really make sense. Money seems to be a big focus," according to Chad, an MK from Africa that Gray created in her book based on MKs she has known.

Recalling his last time at a church on the mission field, Chad says, "As I sat among the Africans, sang their songs, read the Bible, prayed to God, I realized that this was worship in its purest form. ... Women carried their babies for three miles, so that they could be with fellow Christians. After the service, we were served chai and bread, both were rich and sweet, as were the smiles and handshakes. How could I leave this?"

An MK's departure from the mission field and arrival in the States is a time when churches can help MKs as they adjust to the change, Gray says. Her book has numerous suggestions on how churches can minister effectively to MKs who come to America, such as:

- Encourage MKs to talk about their experiences. "Allow opportunities for them to tell their stories. ... Missions-minded churches can offer a haven of acceptance to MKs," Gray writes.
- Sponsor MKs to attend youth camps such as Youth Jericho, Centrifuge, Crosspoint, state GA/Acteens camps or associational youth camps.
- Offer to transport an MK to and from church.
- Invite MKs in your home for Sunday lunch.
- Assist MKs in gathering information about the places where they are planning to attend college. Churches can provide information about community services, shopping and housing.
- Provide college MKs with a long-distance telephone gift certificate so they can call home on special occasions.
- Offer MKs a home away from home during holidays. Invite several MKs so they have someone with whom they feel comfortable. Share your traditions openly with them. Ask them to share theirs.

HOUSE MAIL

**(BP)**

**BAPTIST PRESS**  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, TN 37234

**F  
I  
R  
S  
T  
  
C  
L  
A  
S  
S**

**Southern Baptist Library  
and Archives**