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**Farmer's fluency in Spanish  
flowed from vision for migrants**

**Baptist Press  
12/20/95**

By Joyce Sweeney Martin

BALLARD COUNTY, Ky. (BP)--Lynn Gordon didn't need Spanish 101 nor a Berlitz language course to learn Spanish.

He just needed "a vision," a Spanish-English Bible and a few Mexican migrant workers who needed to know about God's love.

Even though the 39-year-old farmer never has had a formal Spanish lesson or even taken a correspondence course, he converses easily and effectively in Spanish. His wife says he even dreams in Spanish.

And the only explanation he can give is that "God gave me the ability."

The story began five years ago when Gordon first employed Mexican migrant workers on his 580-acre Ballard County, Ky., farm. He knew the wages he paid for the few weeks they worked there would help them and their families "live pretty well" by Mexican standards for the remainder of the year.

But as he got to know the men, he also became concerned about their spiritual conditions.

"I wanted to help with more than money," he said. "I wanted to give them something lasting."

So, after what he described as an apostle-Paul-like vision, Gordon started taking some of the workers to Oscar Baptist Church.

At first, "we didn't know what we were doing," he acknowledged.

But with the help of pastor Marty Brown, West Union Baptist Association director of missions Wayne Newby and Tony Hough of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's direct missions department, the church soon had a ministry off the ground.

During the first three years, Juan Cavallini from Peru preached and taught Sunday school in Spanish "off and on," with Gordon serving as coordinator of the ministry.

But after Cavallini completed his studies at Mid-Continent Baptist Bible College in Mayfield, Ky., and enrolled at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina, Gordon has been "totally in charge," Brown said.

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On any given Sunday at 10 a.m., Gordon stands before as many as 29 migrant workers and teaches the Bible in Spanish.

"It's amazing," Newby said, after sitting in on a class. "Lynn opened up his Spanish Bible and started conversing with the men. He asked and answered questions. He was very relaxed, no stumbling, no stuttering. He was so natural, as though he had been doing it all his life."

The migrants worship in the 11 a.m. service with the English congregation until time for the sermon. Gordon then takes them aside for more teaching.

Over the four years, 25 migrant workers have made professions of faith in Jesus Christ, and one of the workers was called to preach. Oscar Baptist members are helping him learn how to witness, how to preach and leading him through the "Survival Kit for New Christians."

As a bonus of sorts, the Oscar church and West Union association have gotten wrapped up in the ministry as well.

Fifteen churches participate in providing meals on Sundays. West Union has placed \$2,000 in the budget to provide Spanish Bibles, hymnals and literature for the ministry. And associational Woman's Missionary Union director Carlann Harris has gotten the women involved.

"Out in the middle of Ballard County, God has let us personally fulfill the Great Commission," pastor Brown said.

Gordon, too, stands in awe of what God has done.

Learning Spanish has been very easy, he said. He has had little problem adjusting to varying dialects. It's like someone who can "sit down to a piano and just start playing," he said.

Gordon's only study tools have been a Spanish-English parallel Bible and a general language reference book. And, with working 12-hour days on the farm, about all the study he has had time for is "doing my daily Bible readings in Spanish rather than English." He said some of his best thinking is done out on the farm.

Not only has Gordon mastered the language, but he also has researched the cultural and religious backgrounds of the men. "No one knows how to make a perfect connection with a person from another country," he said. "But gradually, we learn."

In 1993, he and Cavallini made a "personal mission trip" to Mexico to the hometown of some of the men. "We wanted to see what their greatest needs are and encourage them in their faith," he said.

They stayed in the home of Heriberto, a 40-year-old worker who had accepted Christ while in Kentucky. They led Heriberto's wife to Christ.

They found the greatest need in the Mexican town to be for the Bible. Among its 8,000 people, very few families had Bibles. So the Kentuckians left 1,000 Bibles in Mexico.

As he reflected on all that has happened in the past four years, Gordon admitted "sometimes it's scary."

He believes God would not have given him "the gift of tongues" if God didn't expect him to use it. "You never know what God has in store down the road," he said.

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EDITORS' NOTE: The following six stories deal with adoption and foster parenting.

Adopting a child requires  
prayer above other factors

By Edith Chenault

Baptist Press  
12/20/95

PLEASANT VIEW, Tenn. (BP)--More than Christian concern, adoption requires prayerful consideration.

Because adoption can be complicated and the child's needs have to come first, "You need to pray about whether to adopt or not, and take your time," said Janice Duffy, coauthor of "How to Adopt a Child."

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"God tends to ask us to do the things we're suited to do," Duffy, of Pleasant View, Tenn., said in a telephone interview. "Ninety-nine point five of adoptive parents would say it's a joy."

For Duffy and her husband, adopting two children has brought them closer together. "It really broadens your horizons when you know the needs out there," she said. "And it gives you a deeper sense of how important it is for a child to have a home."

There is a small minority of children whose adoptions do not work out and, unfortunately, those cases have received the most media coverage lately.

However, "I have never run into a family, once they've decided, that adoption does not become a strong urge for them," Duffy said. "They're willing to put up with the strange things they run into because they are willing to go to the ends of the earth to bring that child home."

More than a million couples consider adoption each year, according to Duffy and Connie Crain in their book. According to statistics released by the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse in Washington, 127,441 children of all races and nationalities were adopted in the United States in 1992, the last year for which statistics are available. Nearly half these adoptions involved stepparents or relatives.

International adoption peaked in 1991 at a little more than 9,000. It dropped to about 6,500 the next year, about 7,340 in 1993 and is projected at 8,200 in 1995, according to statistics from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

One out of 30 people who want to adopt will actually succeed, according to Duffy and Crain. So, why is there the wide disparity between the number of couples who want to adopt and the number of who do?

Many people drop out because of what seems to be the staggering cost. Depending on the type of adoption, it may range anywhere from \$3,000 to \$25,000. "It used to be considered more affordable," Duffy said. "It seems a strange way to put it, but if you needed a car really badly, would you come up with \$8,000? It often is a matter of the priorities in your life."

Many companies are now offering incentives and benefits to employees who adopt, and one bank has even opened an open-ended line of credit for prospective adoptive parents, she said.

Additionally, many hopeful couples or even singles drop out prematurely because of frustration -- they don't know where to turn.

Duffy and Crain's book, "How to Adopt a Child," evolved from their own frustrations and victories with the adoption process. Duffy and Crain, both registered nurses, worked together and began talking about all the questions they had and the questions they were getting about the adoption process.

"They (prospective adoptive parents) don't know who to ask for more information. They don't know where to look. We ended up being scavengers of information about adoption," Duffy said.

She and her husband, Roger, gave birth to two sons and a daughter and have two adopted daughters from Romania. Crain and her husband, David, of Springfield, Tenn., adopted a child privately and another through an agency. "We had run the gamut," Duffy said.

Some prospective parents are leery of the whole adoption process because of the negative publicity about failed adoptions. Many of the adoptions garnering headlines today floundered because the prospective parents failed to check all of the information or get all the legal knots securely tied, Duffy said.

"Today, the majority of adoptions turn out well. But you need to go into it with your eyes open," she said. "Things will get better as adoption laws change." Many states are examining and changing their adoption laws to better meet the needs of the child, she said.

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The book explains the pros and cons of agency adoptions (the couple pays an established agency to find a child for them) versus private adoptions (the adoptive parents find the child on their own, hiring an attorney to complete the legal legwork for them). It guides the reader through pitfalls to avoid in domestic and international adoptions, and helps the reader decipher the volumes of information they will gather.

Duffy and Crain leave the reader with a chapter on further resources, listed state by state with names and telephone numbers included. An additional source of information is the Internet. A 10-minute perusal of Internet resources included such items as a warning about adoption fraud from an attorney; information about U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service guidelines for international adoption; and photo listings of children from other countries from Christian and non-Christian agencies.

Some prospective parents don't even tackle the process because they feel as though they'll be turned down because of their age or because they are single. That's not always true, Duffy said. Again, it pays to check into the laws and regulations in each state and country, if adopting internationally, before becoming discouraged.

Even with the pitfalls and snares, adoption is still considered more reachable than it was 30 years ago. "A lot more people are considering it now," Duffy said. "Generally, everyone knows someone who is adopted, has adopted, or has placed a child for adoption."

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Chenault is assistant professor and communications specialist, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, College Station, Texas, and a member of Millican (Texas) Baptist Church.

Mother put daughter first,  
placing her up for adoption      By Edith Chenault

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--"It wouldn't have been fair for her to grow up with us."

A simple statement, but proof of her birth parents' love.

Jennifer and Peter Briggs of Nashville, Tenn., loved their daughter enough to place her up for adoption six years ago.

Jennifer, who was living in Lennox, Mass., was 15 years old and unmarried when she became pregnant. At first, she went into denial and was able to cover her pregnancy because she only looked at little heavier than when she left school the summer before. But at eight months into her pregnancy, when confronted by a school nurse, she admitted that she was expecting a child.

She and Peter struggled with their decision, finally turning to an agency called the Brookshire Center for Families and Children in Pittsville, Mass., to plan an adoption.

For her, abortion was never considered. She was too far advanced in her pregnancy, and she and Peter wanted to "put the child's needs first. God had a plan for her life. Obviously, she was supposed to be on this earth," Jennifer said.

The agency offered open adoption, and she and Peter looked at a couple of profiles for prospective adoptive parents. She and Peter, both Christians, were looking for a couple who would raise the child in a Christian environment. They finally settled on the second couple, because they were "pretty laid back," Jennifer said. "They were just real, open and honest about life."

The couple had another adopted daughter. Jennifer and Peter figured if that adoption had worked, then it would work for their daughter as well. The couple also had lost a child shortly after it was born. "I felt like they would understand what it was like to lose a child," Jennifer said.

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Her pregnancy came out in the open Oct. 13, 1989, and their baby girl was born on Nov. 8. The baby went home with her adoptive parents Nov. 13. Jennifer and Peter were able to meet the adoptive parents at the hospital and, even though they do not know their daughter's name, still keep in touch with the family twice a year. Jennifer and Peter even sent the couple a photograph after their wedding in 1994.

With a few exceptions, her support system was good. Their parents were supportive and let them make their own decision.

"I really didn't care about what people said at the time," Jennifer says. "Our whole focus during the pregnancy and at the time she was being born was on her." She leaned heavily then, and still leans, on the promise made in Jeremiah 29:11-13: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.'"

Unfortunately, some of their harshest critics were fellow church members. She's been asked how she and Peter remained faithful to God. "I'd tell them, God's not the one hurting me. We're all going to make mistakes in our lifetime. Everyone hits a spot where they can be judged. You ask God for forgiveness and move on."

She remembers feeling overwhelmed by the situation. "It's a grown-up situation. It's hard to go back and be a teen-ager. Having a child is a big responsibility," she says.

Jennifer recommends counseling for birth parents. She says she went for about a year. "It's a healing process when you make a plan of adoption because it's the loss of a child. I don't lie about how bad it hurts," says Jennifer, who also counsels teens at summer camp. "It's not something that feels good. I think about it every day."

She encourages anyone who is in a crisis pregnancy to get as much information as possible about their options, and then go with what their heart says is right.

Jennifer, who is about to complete a master's degree in nursing, and Peter, an electronic technician in the music industry, look forward to having their own children. Their firstborn is always on their minds. "She's very special; she's with us all of the time, in our hearts, anyway."

And if their daughter tried to find them later? "She would be welcome, even if it was just to say hello. To be some small part of her life would be nice. I would never want to disrupt her life if she's happy."

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He says kids needing adoption  
aren't 'someone else's mistake'

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BRIDGETON, Mo. (BP)--Blacks adopt more than any other race, notes former pro football player Don Johnson, now an adoption specialist with the Missouri Baptist Children's Home at Bridgeton.

"Children living with aunts and other family members is a part of our culture. A lot of the problem is the need to understand the paperwork," says Johnson, who says his work involves "trying to correct some of the misconceptions about adoption."

Many times, families are determined to adopt an infant rather than an older child because "they don't want to take on someone else's mistake," Johnson says.

"I think they are looking at it wrong," he replies. "Many of these kids are coming from rough situations, but they will be able to reach their full potential if they come into contact with good parenting skills. There are no bad kids, only bad situations."

"Children are open and clean and God uses them," Johnson says. "They have the ability to go through adversity and then go on."

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Of fulfillment he senses from his work, Johnson says, "The reward is in the end result. Just knowing that I played a small part in getting a child out of the system and into a family to build a day-to-day relationship is wonderful."

Johnson came to the Missouri Baptist ministry after stints with the Winnipeg Canadian football team, the San Francisco '49ers and the New York Jets, playing a variety of positions -- and earning a master's degree in counseling psychology from the University of Missouri-Columbia during his time away from the gridiron. He also has worked with juveniles at the Lakeside Center for St. Louis County and as co-director of the Black Culture House at the university campus in Columbia.

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Based on reporting by Vicki Stamps, a correspondent for Missouri Baptists' newsjournal, Word & Way.

Foster family committed  
to one life at a time

By Russell N. Dilday

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--Life is tough when you are addicted to crack cocaine and were abandoned by your mother on the streets of Little Rock, Ark. It's even tougher when you are just two months old.

But that was Jimmy's situation when a relative took him to a Little Rock hospital suffering from his addiction, malnutrition and neglect. Jimmy (not his real name) eventually was placed with foster parents Larry and Mickie Page, members of South Highland Baptist Church in Little Rock.

"We've had him for a month," said Larry, executive director of the Arkansas Christian Civic Foundation. "He was a couple of months old when we got him. He was in pretty bad shape. He had had no proper nourishment or care or hygiene. Basically, he was suffering from severe neglect."

"They said that at one point he was borderline 'failure to thrive,'" added Mickie, a trustee of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

"He was in trouble for a while," Larry said. "From the condition he was in, he could have been on the street. His mother obviously had a crack cocaine habit because he was born with that addiction."

Larry, known in the state as a right-to-life proponent and lobbyist in his role with the Christian Civic Foundation, said he and his wife became foster parents to "become part of the solution" for unwanted and neglected children.

"We qualified this year, but it's something we've had on our minds for years," he said. "It was the need. So many times you don't do anything because you look at the sheer numbers and the size of the problem and feel hopeless and helpless."

"We finally came to the opinion that we would do what we could -- a life here and a life there," he noted. "We couldn't solve all the problems, but may become part of the solution."

While taking foster parenting classes, Larry said, they noted the need for more Christian involvement in foster parenting. "We asked, 'Where are all the Christians?' Christians should be involved in taking care of 'the least of these.' We didn't see that. The families are there, the homes are there. A lot of people aren't aware of the tremendous need for homes for children who simply aren't wanted."

Jimmy, who is African American, is the Page family's second foster child. The first, an infant girl abandoned after being born in a Little Rock hospital, was adopted by another family.

"I think every white person needs to hold a little black baby," Mickie said, "and African American people need to hold little white babies. In God's eyes we're all pink."

According to the Centers for Youth and Families, 1,972 children were under foster care in Arkansas last year. The Pages also have three daughters -- Sarah, a freshman at the University of Central Arkansas; Jenny, a high school junior; and sixth-grader Katie -- who help care for their foster siblings.

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"It's a family passion," Mickie said. "It's the whole crew that agreed to this."

"I love it," affirmed Jenny. "I love getting up before school in enough time to hold him before I have to leave. I've always loved kids. He's just like a little gift."

"Yeah," said Katie, "it's like Christmas every day. It's good to know that no matter what else happens, he will have one good time in his life where he will be treated as loving as he could be."

Jenny said having a baby brother in the house is a lesson of responsibility for her and her sisters. "I know a lot of teen-agers who think that babies are going to be cute and fun," she said. "I know firsthand that it's not all that, with middle-of-the-night feedings and the spit up all over you when you're ready to walk out the door. We get that all the time. It's good to learn how to deal with that."

Raising a foster child is not without its problems, her mother agreed. "Honestly, we have more laundry and less sleep and less freedom to run and do," said Mickie. "You can organize well, but ... your normal schedule is going to be uprooted because you have added another personality in the family."

However, she added, "you also get those morning flashes when they first wake up and they are feeling good and they love you to death and everything you say makes them smile and laugh."

"For those of us who are Christians, I think we have a built-in need to reach out," Larry noted. "That would be manifested in a lot of different ways for different people. Foster care is not for everybody; being a foreign missionary is not for everybody. This is a niche we fill."

Jimmy's time with the Pages is uncertain. He is in the process for adoption. "I don't know what will happen to this little guy," said Mickie, "but if we can do something now, then that's important."

In addition to care, Mickie said, "The prayers that he will receive as a result of being here will follow him long after he leaves. We will always be praying for him."

Family reminders include a Christmas ornament with photos of their foster children and "a book with pictures so we can say, 'These are kids we love,'" she said.

Reflecting on Jimmy's first Christmas season, Jenny remarked, "I wonder what kind of Christmas he would have if he wasn't with us. I wonder what he would be doing, where he would be, and I wonder about the other kids who don't have that."

Jimmy sleeps now in a warm crib in a loving home. Above his bed is the verse, Luke 9:48, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name, welcomes me."

"We don't expect to change the world," said Larry. "We just want to affect one life at a time."

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Once-childless couple  
now has 16 children

By Melanie Childers

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GRAND RIVERS, Ky. (BP)--Two years ago, Mark and Debbie Gill had decided children were not part of God's plan for their lives. Now they have become parents 16 times, through Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children's foster parent program.

"We were physically unable to have children," Debbie said. And despite their sincere desire, all attempts to adopt a child during their 20 years of marriage had collapsed.

On one occasion, Mark, pastor of Grand Rapids (Ky.) Baptist Church, and Debbie traveled all the way to Oklahoma to realize their dream of adopting. After signing the legal documents, they spent the day shopping at the mall, proudly carrying their new son and beginning to think of themselves as parents.

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But the next day, before they could check out of the hotel and return home, the birth mother and her attorney met them to tell them she had changed her mind.

Heartbroken, the couple had to return the child.

After such disappointment, the Gills were ready to give up. That was when they saw a newspaper ad placed by Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children inviting adults to attend an informational meeting concerning foster parenting. They decided to go.

"Once we got into the training and assessed our own strengths and needs, we felt like it was the right thing to do," Debbie said.

They were licensed in October 1993, and their first children arrived in January 1994.

The Gills' world immediately underwent revolutionary changes.

"We were frightened at first. After 20 years with no children, we've had to make a lot of adjustments," Debbie acknowledged.

"We went from sitting on the couch at 10 o'clock and saying, 'Let's go out for a piece of pie' -- to just hoping we'd make it to 10 o'clock," she said in a tone of exhaustion.

In less than two years, the couple has served as a foster family for 16 children, ranging in age from 1 to 16.

"It's the hardest thing I've ever done," Debbie said. "But I can't imagine going back."

Their days begin early, helping children get ready for school. And every afternoon presents a different schedule for counseling, tutoring and extracurricular activities.

One of the biggest adjustments was learning parenting skills. "Not having had children, the training seemed confusing," Debbie said. "Just listening, some of it didn't make sense. But now, we're using it every day."

She said most children come to them petrified after sustaining such problems as abuse, neglect, broken homes or death in their families. Many have behavioral problems and will "push and push and push" against the boundaries, she continued. Often it takes time before they trust the Gills.

However, after months of consistent parental love and care, offering them a chance to heal and be heard without fear of being hurt, the children begin to come to grips with their own emotions, Debbie said. Slowly, the children show signs of self confidence. Their entire outlook changes as they improve at school, learn responsible behavior and find happiness.

The children also receive lots of love and attention from their church.

"There's nothing any greater than seeing them make those major steps," Debbie said. "You've had a part in giving a child an opportunity to live."

The Gills capitalize on the support and continuing education offered through Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children, always looking for ways to improve their skills.

"Kids need a mom and a dad," Debbie said. "That's what we are."

An unexpected twist to the Gills' journey is that they currently are in the process of adopting two of the children for whom they have been foster parents. They plan to continue offering foster care even after the adoption is final.

"It's a double miracle from God," Debbie said of the adoption option. "We didn't go into foster care expecting to be able to adopt." But: "Mark and I are so blessed. We have good friends and a strong support system. It would be a shame for us not to do it."

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Retirees reopened nursery  
to become foster parents

By Melanie Childers

Baptist Press  
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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Foster parents O.B. and Norma Turnbow haven't pampered themselves much since retirement; they're too busy pampering and caring for newborns.

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The couple long ago put away story books and folded up baby bath towels used by their biological children, who are raising their own families.

But for the last 10 years or so, the Turnbows have reclaimed the nursery in their home and in their hearts. They serve as foster parents for infants through Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children.

Each time they are assigned a new baby, the Turnbows bring the infant home from the hospital about three or four days after birth. They care for him or her until all the legalities for the adoption are put in order -- usually about four to six weeks.

"We just thought it sounded like something we could do," Norma said, acknowledging the work gave the couple a place of ministry.

The Turnbows have cared for 16 children since accepting the challenge of infant foster parenting. They share duties for all of them, including middle-of-the-night feedings.

"It's a partnership," she said. "Some of the children are more attached to one of us than the other."

And the Turnbows don't work in isolation, she added, noting extended family, friends and their church -- Beechmont Baptist in Louisville -- all offer support and love.

One grandchild lives too far away to meet the newborns who come in and out of the Turnbow household. She gets involved by helping choose temporary names for them.

The couple easily becomes attached to their foster children, Norma acknowledged.

"When I go to the hospital and change the baby's clothes, I get attached right then," she said. "But we go in knowing this is a temporary situation ... and at our age we have no illusions" about raising children again. "So we just love them a lot. We just keep them to give them away."

She recalled one particular child for whom they had provided care much longer than usual -- about six months. Through mutual friends, they and the adoptive couple became acquainted before the placement was finalized.

"We had named the little girl Amy," Norma recounted. "But we found out that the adoptive couple was going to name the girl Hope. So for the last month she was with us, we called her 'Amy-Hope' to help her get used to hearing her new name.

"We still call her that today, and she's 8 years old now," Norma said through tears. "When the family adopted the little girl, they adopted us, too." The two families spend time together regularly, she said.

Facing "placement day" -- the day the Turnbows present their foster child to his or her new parents -- creates mixed feelings, Norma said.

"We usually start out the day by giving the baby a bath and putting on the prettiest clothes we have," she said. "We usually get to the children's home a little early so we can go on in" before the adoptive couple arrives.

After the appropriate documents have been signed, the Turnbows present the child to the new parents. A brief ceremony of dedication follows.

"It's a lot of excitement," Norma said. "There are tears, but they're tears of joy, not sadness."

However, she did acknowledge the house seems uncomfortably quiet when they return from placement day. "It's a bitter-sweet day."

On Hope's placement day, the Turnbows had to drive from western Kentucky, where Norma's mother-in-law had just died, to Middletown to present the child to her new parents. Afterward, they immediately returned to western Kentucky to participate in the funeral.

Norma said the adoptive couple told them later how worried they were for the Turnbows, "because we had experienced two losses in one day," she said. "Our response to that was there was so much love in that room when we gave Hope to her parents that it was not a loss."

**Don Kirkland named editor  
of S.C. Baptist Courier**

GREENVILLE, S.C. (BP)--Donald M. Kirkland was elected editor of the Baptist Courier by trustees of the South Carolina Baptist newsjournal Dec. 15, to take office March 1 on the retirement of John E. Roberts.

Kirkland, 52, has been a member of the Courier editorial staff 21 years, first as assistant and since 1983 as associate editor.

Kirkland was recommended for the editorship by the five-member trustee search committee, who also constitute the board's executive committee, headed by Earl D. Crumpler of Greenville. "We have given serious study to 16 resumes and recommendations," he told the board. "Most of them are well qualified, but none more so than Don Kirkland."

The board, with 14 of its 15 members present, elected Kirkland by unanimous vote.

The editor-elect was born in Columbia, S.C., and spent most of his youth in Lancaster. His father, the late Lewis M. Kirkland, was for 13 years pastor of High Point Baptist Church. Later he was director of missions in Kershaw Baptist Association. His mother, Gladys Hallman Kirkland, 90, lives in Magnolia Manor Nursing Home, Greenwood.

Kirkland is a graduate of Anderson College and the University of South Carolina. He studied at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina, completing his master's degree work at Erskine Seminary in Due West, S.C. He is a member of Earle Street Baptist Church, Greenville, which licensed him to the ministry. He is a member of the alumni board at Anderson College and in May takes office as president of the college's alumni association.

Kirkland and his wife, Linda, a teacher at Riverside High School, Greer, have two children, Jeff of Greenville and Angela Slaybaugh of Mauldin.

John E. Roberts, retiring editor, had high praise for Kirkland. "He is eminently qualified for the editorship," Roberts said, "and I am highly pleased by the board's choice. He is committed to the ministry of Christian journalism. I am proud to have been his mentor for 25 years, 21 of those years at the Baptist Courier."

Roberts continued, "Don Kirkland knows and loves South Carolina Baptists and has learned his craft well."

Roberts will complete 30 years as editor when he retires. He told the board chairman of his retirement plans Sept. 1, and in a called trustee session Sept. 15 they affirmed the executive committee as the search committee.

The committee held several meetings to define qualifications and evaluate resumes. They sent all trustees Kirkland's resume Nov. 30, with a letter calling the board into the Dec. 15 meeting to act on their recommendation.

When Kirkland assumes office, he will be the 10th editor in the Courier's 127 years. Roberts has by far the longest tenure, his 30 years making him the dean of Southern Baptist state paper editors.

"As editor," Kirkland said, "I intend to stay out of political squabbles that divide us and sap our spiritual strength; I aim to support wholeheartedly the ministries that South Carolina Baptists are carrying out through the Cooperative Program; and I want to do all I can to help strengthen our convention's churches."

'Get real ... ready ... right,'  
Leavell urges New Orleans grads By Debbie Moore

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"Rather than looking at the past and trying to recall days that were different -- and, in the eyes of many, were better -- let's take a long look at the here and now, for that's the only one that you're going to have the privilege of working in," Landrum P. Leavell II told graduates during the annual mid-session commencement service at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary Dec. 15.

During the 78th annual graduation, 119 students completed requirements for their degrees, including the first graduates from the seminary's Spanish extension center in Tampa, Fla., Jose A. Islas and Fernando Islas Sr.

The Islases, also the first father and son to graduate from New Orleans Seminary with the same degree on the same day, each completed the associate of divinity in pastoral ministry degree, which they began together in 1988.

Both are pastors in Florida, Jose at Wauchula Spanish Mission and Fernando at Ona Baptist Spanish Mission. Now that he has completed his degree, Jose will be returning to Puerto Rico in January to become pastor of Iglesia Biblica Bautista in Cabo Rojo.

Including the Islases, New Orleans Seminary granted 17 associate degrees, 20 baccalaureate degrees, 63 master's degrees and 19 doctoral degrees.

Leavell, the seminary's retired president, said in his address, "Get real. Understand that you are entering a war zone. It's just as real as Bosnia, ... but it's spiritual warfare. It is intense and it never gets easier. When you go into local church ministry, you're going to be in touch with the real world. Understand the world of which you are a part.

"Secondly, get ready," Leavell said.

"You didn't make this sordid mess ... but it is where you're going to live your life and conduct your ministry. That's one of the most glorious things about training in the city of New Orleans: You're not going to find anything new out there anywhere you go! It's all right here!

"But how did this mess happen?" he asked. Steadily increasing rates of divorce and births of illegitimate children over the past few years "are making an impact on your world today," Leavell said. "The family remains the primary place where children learn about the world and formulate their ideas of right and wrong, where they're taught and trained, and if they don't receive that training in the home, then those homes will send out into the world an army of teen-aged hoods.

"Illegitimacy is the single most important social problem in our time," Leavell said, quoting from an article in a recent Wall Street Journal, "more important than crime, drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare or homelessness because illegitimacy drives everything else."

"The breakdown of the American family could very easily result in the breakdown of our society as we know it," he said.

To get ready for the world in which they will minister, "you've got to give attention to your marriage, to your wife or husband, and to your children, to your home, and to the witness you bear in the home," Leavell said.

"If your home fails, it says a great deal about you and the kind of life that you live and the kind of relationship that you have with those who are closest to you.

"Don't go around crying about living in a fishbowl. I don't know anybody who doesn't live in a fishbowl. If you're a born-again believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are in a fishbowl whether you are in ministry or not. Everybody is looking at you and they're trying to determine if what you have is real."

There are some things for which ministers need to be ready, according to a recent article in Leadership magazine cited by Leavell: -- church attenders who want choice in programming, "and if you don't give it to them, they're going to get it somewhere else," Leavell said.

-- people who are less committed to denominations than they've been in the history of the United States. "They don't know the difference in being a Baptist, a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness," he said.

-- training for pastors that is more hands-on, "and my friends, that's exactly what you've received here at New Orleans Seminary because your faculty has been there and done that. They have experience in the local church; they know what it's all about and they have taught you from that background." But effective ministers also will need to take advantage of continuing education or lifelong learning events. "You need that," Leavell said, "and you'd better make your plans to attend workshops."

-- pastoral authority that is more openly challenged. "There are going to be people who get in your face," he said. "There are going to be people who don't like you. Get ready for it ... and get ready for that first anonymous letter you're going to receive. When you open it, look at the bottom and see if there's a signature, and if there isn't, don't read it! Throw it out. It's junk and it isn't worth your time."

-- volunteers who want meaningful work. "You'd better see to it that they can get it," Leavell said.

-- worship that is more active and spontaneous. "Friend, if you're one of those who wants to start at 11 o'clock sharp and end at 12 o'clock dull, the world's going to pass you by. ... You'd better be flexible enough to change some of the ideas that might have become ingrained in your lifestyle and ministry."

After "get real" and "get ready," Leavell said, "I implore you to get right. The biggest question that faces you and your ministry is, 'Does it really matter to me that people are dying all around me and going into a devil's hell?' Do you care?

"If you don't care and your ministry doesn't matter, let me give you a suggestion: Go on back home. Forget your seminary degree and go to work in your daddy's business. If you don't care, that's where you belong, and not in ministry in a local church.

"But if you do care, never forget that God has called you to a leadership position. ... It's the pastor's responsibility to see that the whole church moves in a well-oiled fashion for the glory of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit, reaching out to touch the world and make an impact upon it. ... Your job is to get the church to articulate its mission and then get about accomplishing it. ...

"It may be in the days to come that God's going to lead you to a traditional church. It may be your job to wake up the dead and lead them to minister to the lost and to the lonely and to all who need Jesus. It is not your job to drive them away and smile to your fellow preachers and say, 'We're having a backdoor revival'

... "Let me tell you something: don't you ever tell a church member, 'If you don't like it, you can get out.' ... Brother, that's God's business and you'd better stay out of it. God's the one who says who is and who isn't a member of his church. He's the one who says who is and who isn't saved, and don't you try to take that over.

"If they elect to stay and work in your church, then you'd better make a place for them, whether you like them or not," said Leavell, the pastor of five churchs of various sizes before he became a seminary president in 1975. He has since served numerous churches as an interim pastor, including First Baptist Church in New Orleans. He is pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church in Wichita Falls, Texas.

"Maybe God's going to call you to a contemporary congregation and your job is going to be to lead those who are committed to that style of worship to accept those who aren't of that mind-set, but to live together as brothers and sisters and to work together for the common goal of building the kingdom of God. ...

"Get ready by making your relationship to Jesus Christ daily and personal, ... r membering that your job in ministry is not to meet the needs of baby Baptists or spoiled saints. Your business is to lead people in getting Christlike, and if you fail in that, you've failed. ... They may not want what they need, but it's your r sponsibility to give it to them straight, right out of the Book. And if you stand by the Book, you're going to be ready to meet any challenge that comes," he said.

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**Southeastern graduates charged to avoid shipwreck**

By Dwayne Hastings

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WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--As if by divine fiat, threatening clouds gave way to Carolina blue skies as graduates marched out of Southeastern Baptist Theological S minary's Binkley Chapel following fall graduation services Dec. 16.

Southeastern President Paige Patterson oversaw the conferring of degrees to 61 d gree candidates from 14 states and three foreign countries in the service.

Most candidates for graduation earned the master of divinity degree. Other degrees granted included the doctor of ministry, master of theology, master of arts in Christian education and associate of divinity.

The school awarded a bachelor of arts degree in biblical studies to Brian Hart, the second such degree since the upper-level baccalaureate program was launched by the Wake Forest, N.C., school in January 1995.

Having begun his bachelor of arts work more than 16 years ago, Hart put his educational pursuits on hold in 1980 when he decided "to take some time off for marriage and family raising."

A state park superintendent in Dillon, S.C., before he came to Southeastern in 1993, Hart indicated his schooling is not complete. He will enter the master of divinity degree program at Southeastern in January.

Jane Ayers, who received the master of arts in Christian education degree Saturday, has more than a degree to show for the time she spent at Southeastern. She met her future husband, Brian, during her first summer at the seminary in 1993.

"Ironically enough, we met in Dr. Paul Carlisle's Theology of Self-Understanding class," Ayers said. The couple was married a year later.

Ayer's husband, who graduated along with his wife, received the master of divinity with Christian education degree. He works in youth ministry at First Baptist Church, Garner, N.C.; Ayers is hoping to work in a para-church agency.

H. Edwin Young, pastor of Houston's Second Baptist Church, delivered the charge to the graduates, telling them they must guard their life, their ministry and their call, from being shipwrecked.

Employing a nautical theme, Young, president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1992-1994, spoke from 1 Timothy, exhorting the graduates to "drop your anchor."

"I see so many people in ministry who are constantly looking to go somewhere else, always wanting a recommendation for a pulpit committee," said Young, who has served as pastor of Second Baptist since 1978.

"Let me tell you something: Where God calls you, put down your anchor," he continued, noting the average tenure of a pastor is less than two years.

You can't even begin to do the work God has planned for you in that short time, Young said. "Paul was saying to Timothy: Drop your anchor. Wherever you go, young man, young woman, you go there to stay the rest of your life."

And when you are there, Young said, "Show your colors; put your standard up so everybody can see it."

The gnosticism Timothy faced was simply a New Ag movement in the first century, Young explained. "It is nothing more than glamorized pantheism and it is still all through the church and the kingdom today."

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The pastor is called to instruct the flock in the truth, Young said. "You must determine you are going to build the right stuff in the lives of those God has called you to serve.

"If you are in the will of God, you will be invincible and you will be able to speak the truth in love and love the unlovely and make a difference right there where you are called," Young said.

He warned the graduates to never get far from their salvation experience. "When we start condemning sin from the pulpit, as we should, we need always to remember that we are here by the grace of God. You can't ever get far from your conversion experience; you can't ever get far from your call," Young said.

"I can't tell you how many times on this campus I went over my salvation experience, how many times I went back to my calling from the Lord," recalled Young, who graduated from Southeastern in 1962. "We need to remember whose we are."

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God," Young said, citing Paul's words recorded at the close of the first chapter of 1 Timothy. It is in this way a believer can set sail on a proper course each day, he continued.

"Begin each day with the Lord God Almighty. If you want your life to count for God, you must start each day with him," Young said, calling on the graduates to make an "an irrevocable commitment" to have an appointment with the "King of Kings and the Lord of Lords" every morning.

The world, the flesh and the devil are deeply concerned about a minister's calling and commitment, Young warned. "They're going to do everything they can to defeat you, to destroy you and to cause your life to end up a shipwreck.

People say they are too busy, Young said, but the power of prayer is indisputable. "Set your sail every morning and the Lord God will not disappoint you."

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