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Arkansas Baptist State Convention

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ARKANSAS BAPTIST



news magazine

State convention leaders unveil restructuring plan

Proposal would streamline current Arkansas Baptist Executive Board structure from 12 departments to a network of seven ministry-based teams.

"Our committee was not only given permission to recommend change, we were given a mandate to recommend change."

— **TIM REDDIN**

Chairman, Structure Study
Steering Committee



'People Sharing Jesus'

Evangelism Conference geared toward ministers and laypeople, planner notes

Southern Baptist Convention president Tom Elliff will be among featured speakers at Arkansas Baptists' 1997 State Evangelism Conference Jan. 27-28 at First Church in Little Rock. The event, which will focus on the theme, "People Sharing Jesus," also will include testimonies, special music and a slate of eight speakers.

Paul McClung, an associate in the Arkansas Baptist State Convention evangelism department, said the conference theme reflects "the big emphasis throughout the SBC on the witnessing materials, 'People Sharing Jesus.' That's how the gospel will impact communities — family to family, friend to friend, neighbor to neighbor — it has to be on the road of relationships."

Emphasizing that "all of the conference speakers are personal witnesses themselves," McClung added, "Their ministries are built around personal evangelism. They model what they preach in their personal lifestyles and ministries in innovative ways, using every method and process available."

During the Monday afternoon session, participants will hear messages from O.S. Hawkins, pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas; Jerry Pipes, an associate in the personal evangelism department of the Home Mission Board; and Johnny Hunt, pastor of Woodstock Baptist Church in Woodstock, Ga.

The Monday evening session will feature speakers Phil Roberts, director of the HMB's interfaith witness department; Bill Fay, an evangelist from Englewood, Colo.; and state convention president Rex Home, pastor of Immanuel Church in Little Rock.

Pipes and Chuck McAlister, pastor of Second Church in Hot Springs, will speak during the Tuesday morning session while Hunt and Roberts will deliver messages during the Tuesday afternoon session.

Elliff, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Del City, Okla., will be the featured speaker in the conference's closing session on Tuesday evening.

There is no cost for attending the Evangelism Conference. McClung urged ministers and laypeople to attend all the sessions, noting that "the evening sessions will be worship sessions with special prayer times. We want laypeople to participate and to attend, experience the worship services and go away challenged to witness. The Evangelism Conference is for everybody."

For more information, contact McClung at the ABSC evangelism department toll-free in state at 1-800-838-ABSC or in Little Rock at 376-4791, ext. 5132.

Festival of Evangelists

The fifth annual Festival of Evangelists will be held Jan. 27 at First Church in Little Rock prior to the Evangelism Conference. The festival, which is open to the public, will be held in one morning session from 9:45-11:45 a.m.

McClung said the event celebrates the role of vocational evangelism. "We want to encourage and support our vocational evangelists by highlighting their ministries," he said. "The entire conference is planned and staffed by vocational evangelists. Both the preaching and music gives them exposure to pastors and laypeople in churches."

McClung said that "all vocational evangelists are invited — we want others to know that God uses them, this is a legitimate gift and calling and many make great sacrifices to be evangelists."

In addition to the morning program, which features a slate of vocational evangelists, there will be a dinner banquet held in their honor that evening at 5 p.m. All vocational evangelists and their spouses are invited to the dinner at no cost. Reservations may be made by contacting Johnny Jackson at 501-663-6317.

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newsmagazine



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Tim Reddin, chairman of the Arkansas Baptist structure study steering committee, said the proposal to restructure Executive Board staff ministries will be presented to the full Executive Board for action during a called meeting March 27.

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'Courageous Faith'

More than 4,500 Arkansas teens urged to 'get into God's Word'

Trennis Henderson

Editor, Arkansas Baptist

Concluding 1996 amid a challenge to experience "Courageous Faith," more than 4,500 youth gathered at the Statehouse Convention Center in Little Rock for Joy Explo '96, Arkansas Baptists' annual Youth Evangelism Conference.

Two days of youth-oriented messages, testimonies and concerts resulted in 165 young people making public decisions, including 26 professions of faith in Christ, 132 recommitments and seven commitments to full-time Christian service.

Featured speaker Buster Soaries, senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, N.J., emphasized that "you can never really know who you are until you know exactly who God is."

Declaring that "our God is an awesome God," Soaries reminded the young people that "God made me in the image of God and God made you in the image of God — we are awesome folks."

Insisting that drugs, pornography and premarital sex are merely symptoms of a greater problem, Soaries added, "The problem can be solved when people know who they are.... God gave us the power to control our surroundings. God made us to be in charge of ourselves."

Since humans "kept getting confused about what is right and what is wrong, God decided to become one of us to show us what He had in mind," Soaries noted.

"God can do anything," he affirmed. "God became Jesus and died for our sins.... Are you really connected to that awesome God?"

During an interview following his message, Soaries said his primary goal as a youth speaker is for "one kid to make a commitment to Christ that lasts forever" and for "one kid to make a commitment to do something for Christ that will last forever."

Soaries said events such as Joy Explo "are critical for kids to be in contact with the reality that thousands of other kids are willing to celebrate Jesus."

Conference coordinator Randy Brantley, an associate in the Arkansas Baptist State Convention evangelism department, echoed Soaries' view about the importance and impact of such events.

"We're challenging students who do

not know Christ to claim courageous faith by accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord," Brantley explained. "We are challenging Christian youth to wake up, stand up, speak up and move forth to change the world."

Brantley said the theme, "Courageous Faith," is a call for young people "to deepen your discipleship; to know the Lord in a deeper, more effective way; to not be content with the status quo because Jesus is not content with the status quo."

With messages by Soaries, state convention executive director Emil Turner and youth speaker Ronnie Hill as well as concerts by Two Hearts, Rebecca St. James and East to West, Brantley said the event's overall goal is "life changes that result in life action."

"Kids today are looking for an exciting faith," he pointed out. "This is a fun event but it is also an event where we discuss serious faith."

According to Jay DeMarcus, a member of East to West, "Our main goal is to paint a very loving, forgiving portrait of who Christ is. We want to let people know God is a loving and forgiving God and that through the blood Jesus shed for us there are no yesterdays."

"As Christians, our everyday lives are greatly influenced by our walk with Christ," added fellow East to West member Neal Coomer. "Our responsibility is to provide people with an opportunity to draw closer to the Lord."



Contemporary Christian recording artist Rebecca St. James challenged youth attending Joy Explo '96 to "be totally sold out" in their commitment to God.

forward lyrics as "Jesus, your Word stands forever, changing me forever," the 18-year-old vocalist from Australia reminded the enthusiastic crowd that "God is watching everything we say, everything we do and everything we think."

"How is God feeling about how you are living your life?" St. James asked. "We need to be so careful that we're set apart by God so that we can be totally sold out for Him."

"Get on your knees before the Master," she urged. "It's the only way you'll get on your feet."

Reflecting on the two-day celebration, Brantley concluded, "The greatest highlight is seeing kids' lives changed. I hope kids will hear something here that will get them into God's Word and help them move forward in their faith and help them love a friend to Christ."

COURAGEOUS FAITH
JOY EXPLO '96

During her Monday night concert performance, Rebecca St. James urged young people to "just totally worship God with your heart."

Sharing songs with such straight-

A Pastor's Heart



Emli Turner

ABCS Executive Director

"Preacher, can I talk with you — privately?" I was preaching a revival several years ago. The deacon wanted to "share something with me." For two hours I listened to him complain about his pastor. In his opinion, the man wouldn't work hard enough, wasn't spiritual enough and did not preach well enough. The church was "going down." What should they do?

I Thessalonians 5:12-13 gives excellent advice on how to relate to such pastors. "Appreciate," "esteem them," "in love," "in peace" are key concepts in these verses. God saw your pastor as he was when your search committee sensed God's leading to the man. God led your church to call him.

My friends, there are some rare instances when because of moral or theological issues a church may be right in refusing to support its pastor.

No pastor is perfect, but then neither is any church or church member. Love, pray for, support and follow your pastor. God will bless you and your church.

■ Have you read *Moral Earthquakes & Secret Faults* by O. S. Hawkins? (Broadman & Holman, 1996). This is a much needed book that can help us be more sensitive to our own sins. Our own moral flaws may not be as obvious as those we condemn in others. But, our own sins are the ones that are destroying us.

Executive director's schedule:

- Jan. 9-10** ABCS Staff Retreat, Lake DeGray
Jan. 12 (p.m.) Celebration Church, Conway
Jan. 13 (p.m.) Caddo River Association workers meeting
Jan. 14 DOM/Exec. Board Staff Retreat, Calvary, Little Rock
Jan. 18 Pastors and wives retreat, Garland Association
Jan. 19 (a.m.) Friendship, Springdale

Woman's Viewpoint



Sandra Ann Hinkson

Markham Street Church, Little Rock

Life was great! At least I thought it was. I was married to a great guy who was a wonderful pastor and preacher at an awesome church where God was at work in a mighty way. We had two precious children who were a joy not only to us but to our church, too. Life was great!

The problem was Satan had me right where he wanted me — in a state of contentment. That contentment ended abruptly one afternoon as our family was having lunch with our minister of outreach and his wife, Herbert and Barbara West. From out of nowhere Herbert said to me, "Sandy, I've never heard your testimony. You need to share it with the church sometime." Fear struck! I really didn't know what my testimony was. I had walked the aisle of the church as a child and as a young adult and had been baptized both times. I would bounce back and forth as to thinking which was my salvation experience.

During the next several weeks God

worked non-stop on me. The journey I was on was not pleasant by any means, but the end result was worth the price. Through many ways God brought me to realize that I had never accepted Him; I was lost. It is not until you know you are lost that you can be saved. It was wonderful to know for sure that I was lost because I knew what I needed to do to solve that problem. That very morning before the sun dispelled the darkness of the night, the Son changed the darkness of my soul to light. As I opened my eyes my Bible was laying open in front of me. It was as though there was only one verse printed on those two pages. Jumping out at me were these words, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13). How thrilling to have God confirm so quickly that I was His child.

I am so thankful God put Herbert in my life to jar me out of my state of contentment. How many folks do you think we might be friends with, or go to church with who are just content but not saved? Don't let contentment rob you of the gift of salvation!

Sandra Hinkson is the minister of education at Markham Street Church in Little Rock. Her husband, Ed, is director of missions for Pulaski Association. They are the parents of two young adult children. Sandy is the president-elect of Director of Missions Wives.

quotes

"You can never really know who you are until you know exactly who God is."

—Buster Soares

Keynote speaker, Joy Explo '96

"We are challenging Christian youth to wake up, stand up, speak up and move forth to change the world."

—Randy Brantley
 Joy Explo coordinator

"Get on your knees before the Master. It's the only way you'll get on your feet."

—Rebecca St. James
 Contemporary Christian recording artist

ARKANSAS BAPTIST

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Straight from the Editor



Tommie Henderson

Editor, Arkansas Baptist

The beginning of a new year symbolizes a time to pursue new opportunities and face new challenges. Arkansas Baptist life is no exception. In addition to highlighting the proposed restructuring plan for the state convention's Executive Board ministries, the first issue of 1997 introduces a new look for the *Arkansas Baptist News Magazine*.

Longtime readers will still find much that's familiar in the pages of the *News Magazine* while the new design will hopefully attract even more readers in the future. The goal is to continue to provide timely news and information packaged in a more contemporary format that's upbeat, attractive and easy to read.

We realize that some people will

'Inform...Inspire...Involve'

appreciate the changes while others would prefer to keep things as they have been in the past. Please understand that this issue of the *News Magazine* is not so much a finished product as it is a work in progress. The *News Magazine* staff welcomes your input as we seek to produce a quality publication that meets the needs and interests of as many Arkansas Baptists as possible.

Why bother to change at all? As Arkansas Baptist executive director Emil Turner pointed out about proposed Executive Board restructuring, "The future demands change." The same is true for the *News Magazine*. Constant changes in the field of journalism dictate that we seek to keep pace with the latest technology in an effort to effectively serve our readers.

Even amid constant change, many things will continue to stay the same. Just as emphasized during the recent Arkansas Baptist State Convention, the *News Magazine* staff strives to inform, inspire and involve Arkansas Baptists in ministry efforts at home and around the world.

The "inform" part of the *News Magazine*

is obvious. We're an Arkansas Baptist-focused publication which shares information ranging from local church news and statewide training opportunities to national and worldwide ministry efforts. That commitment hasn't changed.

The *News Magazine's* "inspire" goal involves sharing stories about Baptist churches, ministers and laypeople who are making a positive impact for the kingdom of God.

The *News Magazine* strives to "involve" readers in Arkansas Baptist life. Whether it's encouraging involvement in partnership missions, personal witnessing or Christian stewardship, the *News Magazine* offers an ongoing challenge to become personally involved in what God is accomplishing through Arkansas Baptists.

As we start a new year with a new look, the *News Magazine* will continue to inform, inspire and involve our readers throughout 1997 and beyond. If there are members of your congregation who don't receive the *News Magazine*, call us today at 1-800-838-2272 or 376-4791, ext. 5156.

Break down barriers

Concerning the article in the Dec. 12 issue about the great number of church starts in 1996, praise God for a record number of new church starts. It is an indication of the revival that I pray that God is preparing. It also shows the dedication and hard work of those directly involved in these new beginnings.

Having said that, I must call into question the practice of categorizing churches by racial or ethnic origins. Ephesians 2:14 says, "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall."

Ephesians 4:4-6 tells us, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

Ephesians 4:3 commands us to be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Paul writes to the Ephesians to tell them of the great mystery of the church, the unification by God of the Jew and the Gentile into one body, the body of Jesus. Nowhere in Ephesians did Paul attempt to set up a Jewish church or a Gentile church. He just planted churches.

I understand that geographic location is going to affect the make-up of a church and that churches will be predominantly

Anglo or predominantly black or some other ethnic group but that is no reason to classify any church by race. That type of classification implies that a particular church is meant exclusively for one race and other races are not really welcome for membership. Instead of diligently preserving the unity of the Spirit, we are highlighting our differences, causing separation and division.

It is time for Southern Baptists to do away with racial and ethnic labels and start celebrating the work that God has done in starting new churches and drawing all people to salvation. God does not see His children as black or white but as covered by the blood of Jesus.

David L. Johnson
West Fork, AR

OBU deserves support

Much has been said at our recent state convention and in this paper about the decision to have a joint committee selecting Ouachita trustees. Some have said they would lead their churches to withhold Cooperative Program funds from Ouachita because of this decision by our convention. When these threats are being made, I never hear anyone mention the students and the faculty, even though they will be the ones most affected by any decision to boycott Ouachita.

I could say much about why the

Ouachita faculty deserves the support of those in Arkansas who value a Christian education and a faculty that honors the Word of God. I could give many examples of students whose lives have been enriched because of their years at Ouachita.

I want to mention one group that is especially important to me. Approximately 80 students whose parents are Southern Baptist missionaries attend Ouachita, including my son. This is far more than attend any other school. These students and their parents chose Ouachita partly because of Ouachita's willingness to help them financially. An equally important reason is that Ouachita is a school that is both theologically sound and cares enough about MKs to make a special effort to minister to them while they are in school. This is especially important to a parent who lives 10,000 miles away from their son or daughter and may not see them for one or two years at a time. As a Southern Baptist missionary, I want to thank Ouachita for their commitment to missions and to our missionary families. Ouachita is an institution that shows their faith by their deeds (James 2:14).

I hope that no church will act in a way that will harm the students, their parents and the faculty of Ouachita. It is important that all Baptists hold those accountable who spread misinformation for selfish motives (James 3:16).

Ron West

Southern Baptist missionary
Taichung, Taiwan

Letters to the Editor

'A complete overhaul'

Study committee plan designed to streamline Executive Board ministry

Trennis Henderson

Editor, Arkansas Baptist

What's new for 1997 in Arkansas Baptist life? If proposals from the Arkansas Baptist Executive Board's structure study committee gain the approval of the full board in March, state convention messengers will have the opportunity to answer that question next fall.

What may be new is a complete overhaul of the Executive Board staff structure. The proposal would move the convention's Executive Board ministries from the current structure of 12 departments to a network of seven ministry-based teams.

The structure study process, authorized by the ABSC Executive Board in 1995, involves the work of a 13-member steering committee and three nine-member subcommittees. Following several months of research and evaluation, the steering committee proposed a mission statement, vision statement and core values to guide the Executive Board staff's overall ministry.

The mission statement specifies that "the Executive Board programs of the ABSC exist to assist individual churches and associations to accomplish their biblical mission." The vision statement explains that "we seek to impact individual churches and associations by providing the highest quality people, services and information that will enable our churches to evangelize the lost, start new work, worship God, develop believers and minister to people."

The core values, a list of 29 specific principles, focus on such issues as the Bible, the local church, church growth and integrity. Among the core values are affirmations that:

- "The Bible is the Word of God, truth without mixture of error."
- "The Bible is our source of authority."
- "The church is God's agent for extending the message of salvation to all people."
- "We will treat all persons with dignity and respect."
- "Our staff is the most important resource we have to offer churches."

The proposed structure will center around a ministry planning team that will coordinate efforts among seven major

areas of work. The seven ministry teams and related assignments will include:

- **Executive & Administrative Team:** Convention management, office of camps and assemblies, office of information and communication, personnel office, business services, prayer ministry, international partnerships, continuing education and Cooperative Program promotion.

- **Evangelism & Church Growth Team:** Discipleship, Bible teaching, evangelism.

- **Leadership & Worship Team:** Music and worship, pastor and staff, church leadership, crisis support, stewardship/annuity and capital fund-raising.

- **Family Ministry Team:** Marriage enrichment, single and senior adult ministries, parenting, men's ministries, women's ministries.

- **Missions Team:** Missions ministries, men and boys missions education, World Mission Conferences/church renewal, construction and disaster relief, cooperative ministries.

- **Missions Promotion Team:** Women and children missions education, promotion and support.

- **Student Ministry Team:** Baptist Student Union, collegiate church involvement, student missions, resource management.

Other recommendations from the study committee include affirming efforts "to promote increased Cooperative Program giving by our churches," continuing to utilize a convention budget formula that will be revised every five years and assigning the board's operating committee the responsibility of reviewing the Executive Board staff's organizational structure "at least every five years."

Implementation guidelines call for the new structure to take effect in 1998, with the executive director and associate executive director assuming responsibility

for the implementation process. The proposal also notes that the executive director and associate executive director "will be responsible for assigning personnel to teams and naming the team leader."

During a recent presentation to the Executive Board program committee, ABSC executive director Emil Turner said specific personnel decisions will be made "after the structure is determined."

Although reducing the number of staff members is not a specific goal of the restructuring process, "we believe one of the effects will be to make it smaller," he acknowledged.

When the structure study process was initially set in motion, the ABSC Executive Board action called for the steering committee and related subcommittees "to study and recommend a plan by which the Arkansas Baptist State Convention can most effectively meet the challenges of the 21st century."

Former ABSC executive director Don Moore said at the time that the study was designed to "give us an opportunity to respond to trends in Baptist life and in society that may call for some changes in programming and structure." He highlighted the need "to exercise initiative and creativity that would put us on the cutting edge of renewed effectiveness in our churches."

Early in the study process, Turner was elected to succeed Moore as executive director. Sharing his vision of structure needs with the study committee, Turner emphasized that state convention leaders need to provide "a response-driven organization" to benefit local Baptist churches.

"My desire as executive director is that what we do results in more people being saved," Turner explained. "I want us to become more concerned with effectiveness and I believe efficiency will follow."

Proposed Executive Board Restructuring



According to steering committee chairman Tim Reddin, director of missions for Central Association, "The only kind of changes we are interested in making are changes to help our churches minister more effectively."

Noting that "we have churches ministering in a changing environment," he added, "We are going to have to make changes necessary to address changing needs."

The proposal already has gained the approval of the board's operating committee and program committee. If it gains full board approval during a called meeting

March 27, "it will give adequate time for the administration to be ready for implementation," Reddin said.

In addition to changes related to the Executive Board staff, the committee continues to study relationships with the convention's statewide institutions and agencies. Those proposals are expected to be presented to the full Executive Board in August.

Reflecting on the overall structure study process, Reddin noted, "What came through loud and clear is that our committee was not only given permission

to recommend change, we were given a mandate to recommend change."

Emphasizing that "the future demands change," Turner told the Executive Board program committee, "We must change from being program-driven to being impact-driven.... We're not going to reach people with 1957 approaches."

Acknowledging that statistical studies indicate "we're not as effective as we think we are," Turner said the overall goal of restructuring "is to impact the 1 million-plus unchurched people in Arkansas one church at a time."

Committee chairman: 'We were given a mandate to change'

Tim Reddin

Chairman, Synodical Study Steering Committee

One of the buzzwords of our day is "restructuring." Corporations are doing it. Governments are doing it. Denominations—including the Southern Baptist Convention—are doing it.

So it probably came as no surprise when in August 1995 the Arkansas Baptist State Convention Executive Board formed a committee to study our program and structure and to make appropriate recommendations to the 1997 convention.

For the past year, I have served as steering committee chairman for this process. It has been a time-consuming but deeply rewarding experience. We have worked with Baptists throughout Arkansas. We have studied what we do and why and how we do it. We feel a great sense of accountability to the Arkansas Baptist family, not just to do a thorough job but also to communicate as clearly as possible with you. Therefore, we are extremely grateful to the *Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine* for providing this means of sharing our hearts with you.

Why restructure at all?

Naturally, some questions arise when a project of this magnitude is undertaken. The first is the "why" question: Why a study committee? Why now? Why restructure at all?

Our committee came about in response to a need discerned by the ABCS Executive Board and its staff. While periodic program evaluations are always being done, only once in a generation or two is such a complete and thorough review possible. So many things came together to tell us, "Now is the time!" The restructuring of the ABC and other state conventions, the changing leadership in our convention, The shifting paradigms in organizational behavior. The approach of a new century. These, plus a perception we believe was implanted in hearts by God's Holy Spirit, became the markers which signed together to say to our Executive Board, "Do it now!"

Just how? Convention leaders wisely created a process that encouraged openness and wide-ranging input. It called for three subcommittees to study Executive Board programs, relationships with agencies and relationships with institutions, plus a steering committee to receive the subcommittee reports and formulate a defined plan of action to recommend to the convention. The committee members represent Baptists well. These are men and women who love the convention, who believe in what it stands for and who come from the mainstream of Baptist life in Arkansas.

The study committee began with a strong commitment to listen to what the Baptists of Arkansas are saying. We commissioned a research report based on questionnaires solicited from a broad cross-section of our constituency. We

interviewed the heads of all our agencies, institutions and Executive Board departments. With professional assistance, we conducted a series of focus groups with pastors who represented particularly controversial areas of age or church size.

One thing became crystal-clear as we listened to our constituents across the state: we not only had permission to change, we were being given a mandate to change! The overriding theme which we heard from Arkansas Baptists was that while we appreciate what has been done in the past and love and respect those who work for us, we are not well positioned to meet the changing demands of the future.

Not only was our committee mandated to be responsive to our constituency, we have also scrupulously avoided functioning in ways that are legitimately the roles of duly-elected boards and committees of our convention. We have sought to be sensitive to the proper role of the executive director and our agency and institution heads in casting a vision and having flexibility to build leadership teams. We have attempted to be partners in ministry with these leaders, not in an adversarial relationship which we believe is inappropriate in the Kingdom of God.

Another valid question relates to the "what" of our report: What are our recommendations for change? What impact will these changes, if approved, have on the life and work of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention?

In this and subsequent issues of the *Newsmagazine*, the substance of our report will be addressed. We will also utilize other means of getting the word out well in advance of the 1997 convention when members will be asked to vote on these changes. We encourage dialogue, questions and comments. While we have prayed about our report and feel that God's Spirit has directed us, we make no claims that our writings are divinely inspired and without error! We will continue to be open and accountable to our Arkansas Baptist family.

We ask that you give attention not only to the structural changes we propose, but also that you study carefully the statements of mission, vision and core values which undergird these changes. These foundational presuppositions have long been assumed. However, we feel it is important for us to think them through and write them down in public language. These statements give us our "north star" by which we may determine our course and evaluate where we are.

Perhaps once in a generation does so great a moment present itself. An opportunity to express the future. A possibility to advance the Kingdom of God in a significant way. A time to rethink everything we do and the processes by which we get the work done. What a privilege to be part of such an undertaking! Thank you, Arkansas Baptists, for your trust, your prayers and your thoughtful response.

people & places

COMPILED BY MILLIE GILL

TRANSITIONS

Steven Johnson is pastor of Silent Grove Church. He previously was principal of a Christian school and served as a pastor and youth director in California for 14 years. Johnson is a graduate of the Baptist Bible Graduate School of Theology.

Robert Grummer is pastor of Faith Mission in Huntsville. He previously was the resident manager of the Tommy Jones Memorial Emergency Receiving Home and was minister of youth for Farmington Church. Grummer is a graduate of Arkansas Tech University in Russellville.

Harold Gateley has announced his retirement as director of missions for Washington-Madison Association, effective March 31. Gateley, who has served the association for 14 years, also is a chaplain for a veterans hospital. He and his wife, Audrey, served for 17 years as Southern Baptist foreign missionaries in Korea, where he served two years as president of the Korean Baptist Mission. Gateley, a graduate of the University of Arkansas and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, also is a former board member for the *Arkansas Baptist News* magazine.

Anthony "Tony" Nations has joined the staff of Second Church in Russellville as minister of youth and education. A graduate of Louisiana State University in Shreveport and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, he has served four churches as a staff member during the past nine years. Nations and his wife, Diane, have two children, Amanda and Andy.

Steve Spurgin resigned Dec. 22 as pastor of West Church in Batesville to accept a

call as pastor of First Church of Miamisburg, Ohio.

Mark Cox has accepted the call to serve as minister to youth for First Church of Knoxville. He is a student at Arkansas Tech University in Russellville.

Harold Diffie retired Dec. 29 as pastor of New London Church of Strong, following more than 30 years of ministry. He was a bivocational pastor, working 31 years for Arkansas Power and Light. Diffie previously has served Knowles Church in Strong, Lakeview Church of Arkadelphia and Hickory Ridge Church of Upton, Mo. He attended Ouachita Baptist College (University) and East Texas Baptist College of Marshall and is a graduate of Southern State College in Magnolia. He and his wife, Gloria, have two daughters, two sons and five grandchildren. Diffie, who will be available to serve as a supply preacher or interim pastor, may be contacted at 312 Julia, El Dorado, AR 71730; phone 501-863-8649.

Eddie McCord of Mount Ida is serving as interim pastor of First Church of Oden. He is the retired director of missions for Independence Association.

Paul Shipman, a member of Lake Ouachita Church in Mount Ida, is interim pastor of Sims Church.

CHURCH LIFE

Des Arc First Church presented pastor Melvin York and his family with a minivan as a Christmas gift, in recognition of their ministry to the church family.

North Main Church of Jonesboro recently ordained Clifton Griffin and Bernard Simpson to the deacon ministry.

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Master of Divinity

Campbell Station Church

of Diaz, which recently celebrated 40 years of ministry, held a noteburning service, signifying early payment of the church's indebtedness. Participating in the event were (left to right) charter member Harry Gamble, Ben Smith, pastor Keith Marlin, David McClellan and Arthur Ringuet. The church also observed Harry Gamble Day in recognition of his 40 years of service to the church.



OBITUARIES

Lula Liles Hickey of Mount Ida died Dec. 22 at age 91. Her funeral services were held Dec. 23 at First Church of Mount Ida where she was a member. She is survived by two children, Glenna Lybrand of Mount Ida and Glenn E. Hickey of Benton; three grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

J. B. Messel, 85, died of cancer Dec. 31 at his home in Vilonia. A retired Southern Baptist minister, he had served Arkansas Baptist churches in Berryville, Conway and Vilonia as well as a church in Arizona. Survivors are his wife, Dorcas Simmons Messel; and a son, Joel Ray Messel.

Putting family first

1997 priority projects highlight families through variety of ministry events

Russell N. Dilday

Associate Editor, Arkansas Baptist

January not only ushered in a new year, but a new annual emphasis urging Arkansas Baptists to "Strengthen Families" in 1997. The emphasis will be supported by projects and events ranging from a week of prayer to workshops on key family issues.

Jimmie Sheffield, associate executive director for the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, said the emphasis on families came out of "the long-range planning process, planning for 1996 to 2000. The committee, in discovering what...would be the priority needs of our churches for this period of time, found that the family surfaced as a top concern because of the many difficult situations in which families find themselves today."

After selecting the 1997 emphasis, Sheffield said the committee asked ABCS departments to submit projects related to the emphasis. Among those submitted, the following were designated as priority projects:

■ **Legacy Builders Retreat, Jan. 24-25.** "Legacy Builders is a Brotherhood Commission program that challenges men to rediscover the role of a godly man at home, through the church, and in the marketplace," explained ABCS Brotherhood department director Harry Black. "It is a time for re-evaluating and renewing men's priorities and a time to begin building a legacy that will outlive the man."

■ **State Evangelism Conference, Jan. 27-28.** Strengthening the family will be a focus of the State Evangelism Conference. ABCS evangelism department associate Paul McClung said he hopes that the messages will encourage pastors to make evangelism to families a priority. "Those in the churches who are in a position to influence families are pastors," he said. "If pastors can get a deep commitment to the family from the standpoint of introducing them to Jesus...that will strengthen the family."

The greatest potential for reaching the lost is within families, he said, noting that statistics show that "95 percent of people who come to know Christ do so because of the relationship of a family member."

■ **Children's Music and Family Worship Celebration, April 19.** Built on the foundation of the Young Musicians' Festival, the event will include combined-age children's choirs and younger children's choirs.

"We have come from two directions to make this a family event," said Peggy Pearson, an associate in the ABCS church music ministries department. "We made it an event for grades 1-6 and invited parents to

attend as sponsors and are offering sessions for parents on family worship."

Sessions will be scheduled throughout the day for parents and church leaders on leading worship in the home. Parents also will be provided time to hear their child's choir singing for adjudication and participate with their children in other activities.

■ **Week of Prayer for Strengthening the Family, May 4-11.** Planners say the week will strengthen the family by calling families to pray for one another and calling churches to pray for families.

"We will be preparing support materials to share with every church that will give them suggestions for things to do during the week," said Sheffield.



1997 'Strengthen the Family' priority projects

Jan. 24-25.....Legacy Builders Retreat

Jan. 27-28.....State Evangelism Conference

April 19.....Children's Music and Family

Worship Celebration

May 4-11.....Week of Prayer for Strengthening the Family

for Strengthening the Family

May 12-13.....Institute for Christian Discipleship

June 15-21.....Super Summer JV and Super Summer

Sept. 19-20.....1997 State Sunday School Convention

Ongoing.....Mission Arkansas Family Alert

He also noted that support materials will contain "ideas for developing family prayer partners and special church events to support the emphasis."

To prepare for the week, associations are urged to send representatives to the Family Worship Workshop Jan. 29. Gerald Jackson, associate in the discipleship and family ministry department, said the workshop will equip leaders "to conduct an associational event that will equip churches to conduct a week of prayer emphasis or family conference in associations and other events that will address issues in the church and community."

■ **Institute for Christian Discipleship, May 12-13.** ABCS discipleship and family ministry department director Bob Holley said the event will help strengthen families "through the general session and through special features that center on the family."

He said the institute also will offer training in a variety of areas related to families, "with workshops addressing a wide range of issues relating to family concerns, including marriage enrichment, parenting, grandparenting and single adult issues."

The convention will emphasize families through conferences tailored to meet family needs, said Janet Williams, an associate in the ABCS Sunday School department. Age-group conferences with special emphases on the family will include: "The Family: An Endangered Species," "Positive Partners," "Shaping the Will with Wisdom" and "Laying a Strong Foundation for Faith Development."

■ **Mission Arkansas Family Alert — ongoing emphasis.** Mission Arkansas Family Alert is a missions-based project intended to help churches and associations address family issues and ministry needs.

Jimmy Barentine, director of the ABCS missions department, said the "Family Alert" emphasis will involve all of the department's personnel and "is primarily related to the fact that in missions, reaching the family is where the frontier is."

Barentine said that "everything we do will be done in that context — to alert new church starts to relate to families and take into account the entire family. In missions, the missions task can't be done without reaching entire families."

FINANCES

'Make Your Will' is January focus

Pointing to 1 Corinthians 4:2, Arkansas Baptist Foundation president David Moore said that all Christians are given a trust and must prove faithful in carrying out that responsibility. "This verse is particularly instructive during January, which is 'Make Your Will Month' in the Southern Baptist Convention," he said.

Moore stressed that the Bible teaches "that God has given each of us a trust of some kind. As Christians, a part of the stewardship of our trust involves planning for what will be done with property after our deaths. We have a responsibility to ensure that it will be distributed in a way that is pleasing to our Lord."

Despite that responsibility as stewards, said Foundation general counsel Paul White, surveys show that two-thirds of Americans over the age of 65 do not have a valid will.

"People need to understand that if they don't execute a valid will, their property will be distributed according to state law," he pointed out. "There is no room for charitable giving to Baptist causes or for special family situations."

White explained that the Foundation provides education about wills, trusts and estate planning topics through individual conferences, group seminars and church presentations. Arkansas Baptist pastors also can receive free wills and trusts.

For more information about estate planning, contact Moore or White at the Arkansas Baptist Foundation toll-free at 1-800-798-0969 in state or locally in Little Rock at 376-0732.



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Sports missionary 'building bridges to people'

Mary E. Spaldel

SBC Foreign Mission Board

ROCKVILLE, VA (BP)—Fred Sorrells opens a narrow notebook. It's full of business cards tucked into clear plastic holders.

The cards say a lot about Sorrells, who has developed an extensive network of contacts as a Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board sports consultant in Africa. Although he was appointed in 1980 as an

agriculturalist, Sorrells was so blessed by God in a 1990 sports evangelism project that he has taken up that ministry full-time and transferred to Zimbabwe.

Sorrells has made friends with sports stars and coaches from World A, that part of the globe where people have little access to the gospel. He has met with government officials in several Muslim countries and knows Olympic athletes from all over the world.

"Sports helps build bridges to people," Sorrells emphasized.

For example, on his way to Atlanta for the 1996 Olympics and Paralympics, Sorrells spotted several Africans—wearing Olympic pins—drinking coffee in a London airport. He struck up a conversation with them and learned that they were the Olympic delegation from a Muslim nation in Africa. When they discovered he was

assisting delegations of athletes from several other African nations, they asked him to help with sports programs in their country.

"I've seen the Lord open a lot of doors," Sorrells said during a recent interview at the Foreign Mission Board's Cauthen Missionary Learning Center in Rockville, Va.

The sports evangelist marvels that he is the one walking through those doors. "I'm just a country boy," he noted. "I don't have a background in athletics."

But in Madagascar—an island nation off Africa's eastern coast—God showed Sorrells that didn't matter. More than 650 people accepted Christ as Savior through the first sports evangelism project Sorrells coordinated during the 1990 Indian Ocean Island Games on Madagascar. Malagasy Baptists, Southern Baptist volunteers and fellow missionaries participated in the evangelistic outreach.

The project was a turning point for Sorrells and his wife, Samillee.

"God showed us He was doing something through us for which we really had no 'credentials,'" said Sorrells, who served 15 years as an agricultural evangelist. "Once we make the adjustments God requires of us, it's like stepping onto a moving escalator."

A big adjustment was the family's move to Zimbabwe in April 1995 with their four children. "Being on mission with God means we must constantly adjust our lives to His plans," Sorrells emphasized. "God wants us to get in step—with faith—with what He's already doing."

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Congress to address variety of church-state issues

WASHINGTON (ABP)—Many Washington observers expect more of the same when it comes to church-state issues in the 105th Congress.

A proposed "religious-equality" constitutional amendment may be off the agenda, according to congressional aides and church-state experts. But most agree that vouchers for religious schools and charitable-choice proposals similar to provisions in the recently enacted welfare reform package will be hot topics.

Charitable-choice language in the welfare package, originally sponsored by Sen. John Ashcroft, R-Mo., allows states to contract with religious or other private groups to provide services for the poor.

Although it prohibits any direct grants from being used for sectarian purposes, including proselytizing by religious organizations, it permits such activity when the funds are provided in the form of a voucher.

Opponents say the plan violates the First Amendment by amounting to the establishment of religion by the government.

Supporters say providing the money in vouchers rather than direct grants solves the church-state problem.

Michael Franc, communications director for House Majority Leader Dick Armey of Texas, said Republicans will first address issues such as term limits and budget. But he said GOP leaders also hope to get to "phase two of welfare reform," which he said will include turning to

"privately run programs that can provide services to the poor with minimal or no governmental involvement."

Franc said he expects "sincere efforts to advance the idea of opportunity scholarships," which would provide public funds for students to attend private and parochial schools.

Supporters of adding a religious-equality amendment to the Constitution failed in the last Congress to agree on a specific proposal, and Franc said those differences remain.

Opponents say such an amendment would open the door to the government sponsoring or funding religious activities, violating the First Amendment.

Charitable-choice options

Charitable-choice provisions will be included in nearly every education and social-welfare bill, predicted Brent Walker, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. He added that the most important church-state battle in 1997 will take place not in Congress but at the U.S. Supreme Court, where justices will decide the constitutionality of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Congress enacted RFRA in 1993 to make it harder for government to restrict religious practice.

Oliver Thomas, special counsel for religious and civil liberties for the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, predicted vouchers will not generate as much energy on the national level but

agreed that charitable-choice provisions will be on the front burner.

Paul Thornell, adviser to the Senate Democratic leadership, said the addition of Ashcroft to the Judiciary Committee may "up the ante" on the charitable-choice issue.

Walker, Thomas and Thornell all voiced hope that a bill introduced in the 104th Congress, the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, will move forward. The measure would require employers to provide greater accommodation for the religious observance or practice of employees.

missionary notes

Gary and Mary Jo Merkel, missionaries to Germany, have arrived on the field to begin their first term of service (address: Rilkestr. 17 a, 40668 Meerbusch, Germany). He considers Fort Myers, Fla., his hometown. The former Mary Jo Richey, she was born in Jonesboro. They were appointed by the Foreign Mission Board in 1996.

Mel and Nancy Skinner, Baptist representatives to Russia, are on the field (address: c/o UECB of Russia, International Post Office, P.O. Box 171, Moscow, Russia 1131). He considers Trenton, Mo., his hometown. The former Nancy Pelley, she considers Mena her hometown. They were appointed as Southern Baptist representatives in 1991.

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Odds improving in gambling fight

WASHINGTON (BP)—Bernie Horn is not a betting man. As political director of the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling, he insists wagering is more than a game.

Since November's election, however, Horn affirmed that the odds are improving for the Washington-based lobbying group's fight against the gaming industry.

Over the last two years, efforts to legalize gambling have failed in nearly two dozen states through actions taken by legislatures and voter disapproval expressed through defeated referendums.

In November, bids to legalize gambling were turned back in Arkansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Ohio, Washington, Iowa, Virginia and Guam as well as 33 parishes (counties) in Louisiana.

Anti-gambling groups were not as successful in Alabama, Michigan, West Virginia and New Orleans.

Still, Horn is pleased with the overall success of anti-gambling efforts. "I doubt that there is any interest group in America

that can claim a better record," he said.

"In Ohio we were outspent 15 to 1 and there we had the governor on our side raising money," Horn noted. "In Arkansas we were probably out-fundraised 20 to 1, but in both those states we clobbered them."

Horn said one of the advantages anti-gambling groups have is they don't have to match spending with the gaming industry's multi-million dollar campaigns.

Larry Page, executive director of the Arkansas Christian Civic Action Committee, led efforts to recruit anti-gambling coordinators in virtually every Arkansas county. He also led a statewide drive for new voters which netted a "substantial increase," according to polling officials.

Horn said efforts like those in Arkansas are essential in turning back legalized gambling pursuits.

"If we can just get our message to the voter, it doesn't matter how much the other side spends," he said. "If we fall to get our message out, then they kill us."

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By Bruce Swarth, director,
ABC Church Leadership
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Basic passage:

Genesis 1:27; Matthew 5:13-16,
21-22, 27-28, 43-45a

Focal passage:

Genesis 1:27; Matthew 5:13-16,
21-22, 27-28, 43-45a

Central truth:

Faith compels believers to be responsible.

By faith we believe God is the author of creation. The creation of man is the crown of all God's works (Gen. 1:27) and is unique among all creation. He was created for fellowship in the truth of God. God's purpose in man's creation involves a covenant. Man is the administrator of God's perfect work (vv. 1:26, 28-30; 2:15). Man is responsible to God and to all that He created and to his fellow man, to his family and to himself.

Man is torn between convenience and responsibility. It is a personal, saving faith in Christ that gives us the power to live and act responsibly, even when it is not convenient. Every generation is confronted with changes in tradition, culture and environment and is challenged to live responsibly by faith.

Jesus taught Christians to look beyond the surface issues in life's most difficult challenges. He taught that adultery was not confined to the act. Adultery begins in the heart, mind and attitude (Matt. 5:27-28). He taught that divorce is the violation of a sacred marriage covenant. To violate

the marriage covenant is nothing less than infidelity and adultery (vv. 5:31-32). He further taught that everyone is our neighbor. Christians are responsible to love everyone if they are to honor God and their faith (vv. 5:43-45a).

Human life is important to God. One of the critical issues of our time is the sanctity of human life. Unfortunately, many who call themselves Christians walk totally in step with their culture. It is not convenient to practice biblical faith. We are commanded to be salt and light in our world so it can see the glory God in us (vv. 5:13-16).

All Christians must live responsibly. The dysfunction of our society cries out for us to reject the practice of irresponsible sexual behavior. When we immerse ourselves in God's Word, the result will be a cleansed mind (Rom. 12: 1-2). By faith we must practice the biblical standards of purity and holiness. We must reject the convenience of abortion. We must see it for what it is. In love we must reach out to our world and present to them the options of a better way in Christ.

Matthew's gospel portrays Jesus as the Messiah-King who has the right to rule in the hearts of all people. Throughout the book, the disciples are learning how to be people whose lives are submitted to Him. Today's text highlights two of the basic lessons of lordship.

Those who follow Jesus as Lord must be people of faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). The ruler's daughter was healed in response to her father's faith. Both the sick woman and the two blind men were healed when their faith passed the Lord's exacting test. The principle is still true today: "According to your faith, it will be done to you" (v. 29).

Faith is more than believing that Jesus can do miracles. It is committing ourselves so deeply to His lordship that we will trust Him, regardless of what He chooses to do. Biblical faith believes in miracles but never demands them and always views God's wondrous acts as evidences of His love and grace.

Those who follow Jesus as Lord also must be

people of compassion (vs. 35-38). Jesus Himself is our example, both of what causes compassion and what compassion causes.

Jesus was moved with compassion for the people when He saw their helpless and hopeless condition. We, too, must "lift up our eyes" (John 4:35) and see the spiritual needs of those among whom we live and work.

But Jesus not only felt pity for the people, He also did something to minister to their needs. He asked the disciples to pray for the harvest (v. 38). Then in chapter 10 He sent them out as laborers in the field. Are you a person of genuine compassion? You will demonstrate it by praying for and witnessing to the spiritually needy people around you!

Faith in God and compassion for people — these are two marks of genuine discipleship. Together, they form a "ruler" by which you may measure the degree of your submission to Jesus Christ as Lord. How do you measure up?

Genesis 1:27 is one of the great statements about human life. The verse mentions three profound thoughts: God created humanity; God created people in His image; and God created men and women separately.

When God created plants and animals, He created marvelous beauty and variety. However, one thing can be said about humanity that cannot be said about plant and animal life. God created humans in His image, but He did not create plants or animals in His image. Only human life possesses the image of God, which gives us the ability to relate to God. He treated the value of animal life quite differently from the way He treated human life. God told the Jews that certain animals could be used as food. God directed certain animals be used as sacrifice to Him.

Nowhere is the value of human life so apparent as in Exodus 20:13. God plainly said, "You shall not murder." Why does God make such a marked difference between human life and animal life? Because human life carries the image of God.

Because life is important to God, it should be

important to the child of God. In Matthew 5, Jesus refers to Christians as the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world." Only as the light of God shines in the world through the child of God can the world be changed.

An example of the relationship of the Christian to the world is through the taking of human life. In verse 21, Jesus mentioned the taking of human life. Jesus referred to the teaching of the rabbis and scribes who had encumbered this commandment of God with ungodly traditions. They had made the issue of murder an act where individuals would answer only to a human court, elevating the law of man over the law of God. Jesus was emphasizing that God regarded human life so highly that we will have to answer to Him for the act, not just the human court.

Murder, whether it is by abortion, euthanasia or violence, is an atrocity to God. It is brought about because of an incomplete understanding of God's view of human life. Only as believers become light in the world can the world begin to understand that human life is created in the image of God.

Life and Work Faith & Compassion

By Tim Reddin, director of
missions, Central Association

Basic passage:

Matthew 9:18-38

Focal passage:

Matthew 9:18-22, 27-30, 35-38

Central truth:

Those who follow Jesus as Lord must have faith in God and compassion for people.

Explore the Bible Made in the Image of God

By Bill Bowen, pastor,
First Church, Mena

Basic passage:

Genesis 1:27; Matthew 5:13-16,
21-22, 27-28, 43-35a

Focal passage:

Genesis 1:27; Matthew 5:21-22

Central truth:

Because humans are made in the image of God, life should be greatly valued.

LESSONS FOR LIVING

The gospels present a contrast between the actions of a friend of Jesus and a traitor. Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus with a perfume worth nearly a year's wages (vv. 26:6-13). This act demonstrates how seriously she believed in Jesus. Her sacrificial gift was a true expression of gratitude.

The lesson's focal point is the traitorous action of Judas Iscariot. He is shown approaching the chief priests and striking a bargain to hand Jesus over to them for "30 silver coins" (vv. 26:14-16). This is the equivalent of about \$20.

Was the action of Judas just a momentary slip? No. John relates that Judas was a thief (John 12:6). It was his practice to steal from the apostles' treasury. Was Judas given opportunity to repent? Yes. Having struck a deal, he concealed his plan. He is present with them and Jesus for the last supper (vv. 26:20). Jesus knew his thoughts and reveals that one of the 12 is a betrayer (v. 26:21).

Jesus made one last loving appeal to Judas (vv. 26:23-24). One of the great mysteries of life is that God has a great respect for the free will of man.

It is a familiar scenario. The pastor presents a God-given, God-sized challenge to the congregation. A key member speaks up, "But pastor, we're just a small church. We can't do anything like that!" And sure enough, they don't!

We call it a self-fulfilling prophecy—a prediction which in itself creates the environment that insures it will come to pass. Unfortunately, it happens in churches all the time. It illustrates the truth Jesus told the blind men in last week's lesson: "According to your faith it will be done unto you" (Matt. 9:29).

The feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle found in all four gospels. It apparently taught the disciples a lesson of great significance. Imbedded in this monumental event are four basic principles of our Christian life and service.

■ We must recognize the enormity of our assignment (v. 15). Feeding the multitude was more than difficult for the disciples, it was impossible. So is fulfilling the Great Commission, or anything else God asks us to do. Only divinely miraculous power can make it happen!

Parents wish greatness for their children. They want them to be the greatest football player, the greatest student, the greatest piano player or the greatest Bible-driller. When their children grow up, parents want their children to be great doctors, great lawyers or the greatest preacher ever.

No one faults parents wishing the best for their children. Therefore, no one should have faulted the mother who approached Jesus one day and asked Him to allow her two sons to have the highest position in the kingdom.

The two sons who were involved, James and John, were called "the Sons of Thunder" in Mark 3:17. They were already well-known for their boldness. However, this attitude of boldness was challenged by Jesus because it contradicted the attitude of the kingdom of God. Jesus wanted them to see that the world's viewpoint of greatness is self-serving and self-ambitious, while God's attitude of greatness is characterized by serving others.

The reaction of the other disciples to James and John characterizes the world's reaction to great-

ness. Jesus does not stop men from sinning. He confronts them with their sin. He tries to make them stop and think about the seriousness of the deed. Faced with his sin and confronted by Jesus, Judas had to decide what he would do (v. 26:25). He was not deterred from his decision.

With a show of friendship and affection Judas kissed Jesus. This was to identify Him for the mob sent by the chief priests (vv. 26:47-50). Judas' act of betrayal was the most chilling act of treachery in all of human history. What went wrong?

The true character of Judas was revealed. He was a lost man (Acts 1:15-20). He desired to be with Jesus but on his own terms. He never submitted to Jesus as Savior. He was enamored with the splendor of the miracles, the potential of a political leader who would throw off Roman rule. All of Judas' religion was veneer. The betrayal revealed his true character. We must look deep within ourselves to determine if we want the blessings Jesus can provide or the salvation He alone can bring.

■ We must admit our inadequacy to accomplish the task (vv. 15 and 17). As long as we think we are up to the challenge, we will trust the arm of flesh and fall.

■ We must surrender to God everything we have (v. 18).

■ We must trust and obey God (v. 19). "Trust and obey" is more than a hymn we sing, it is a simple formula that sums up the whole of the Christian life.

And why did such a similar event occur again (15:32-39)? To remind the disciples that these basic truths will work time after time, situation after situation! Jesus wanted to develop in them (and in us) a lifestyle of trust and obedience.

Those who live by these principles will be able to say with Paul, "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). And perhaps those self-defeating words "we can't" will be eradicated from our vocabulary.

Instead of producing the power of God, the world's quest for greatness produces wrath. Verse 24 says that the other disciples became indignant because James and John would dare to place themselves above the other disciples.

Contrasted to self-serving greatness, God's greatness produces servanthood. In verse 32, Jesus used Himself as an example of that attitude of the kingdom. Immediately following the conversation with the mother of James and John, Jesus passed two blind men. The crowds wanted Jesus to ignore the men. They even chastened the two blind men for attempting to talk with Jesus.

Jesus demonstrated servanthood when He stopped and asked the men what He could do for them. The great men of the world would have wanted the blind men to do something for them or get out of the way. However, Jesus showed the disciples that a child of God would seek to serve others.

Greatness that is pleasing to God is one that demonstrates humility and self-giving. The willing servant is the one who will be used by God.

Family Bible Character revealed

By Bruce Swihart, director, ABCS Church Leadership Support Department

Basic passage: Matthew 26:14, 20-25, 47-50; 27:1-5

Focal passage: Matthew 26:14, 20-25, 47-50

Central truth: Deed and actions reveal the true nature of one's character.

Life and Work Lord of the every need

By Tim Reddin, director of missions, Central Association

Basic passage: Matthew 14:13-21, 15:29-39

Focal passage: Matthew 14:15-21

Central truth: Jesus can and will supply every need of those who trust fully in Him.

Explore the Bible The attitude of the Kingdom

By Bill Bowen, pastor, First Church, Meria

Basic passage: Matthew 20

Focal passage: Matthew 20:17-28

Central truth: Godly greatness is demonstrated through servanthood.

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U. S. Supreme Court allows Bible club ruling to stand

WASHINGTON (ABP)—Students at a New York public school can limit leadership in their after-hours religious club to professed Christians, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled. Without comment, the high court left standing a lower court's rejection of the school's requirement that the club's leadership posts should be open to all students.

The case involved a student, Emily Hsu, who in 1993 sought, with another student, to form the "Walking on Water" Bible club at Roslyn High School in New York. The school district approved the club's application to meet after hours, but only on the condition that the club's proposed constitution drop a requirement that officers be professed Christians. School officials based their decision on a district-wide policy barring discrimination based on race, sex or religion.

A federal-district court sided with the school district but the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals disagreed, saying the club's decision to "impose a religious test for leadership positions" was permissible, since it was "made purely for expressive purposes — to guarantee that meetings include the desired worship and observance — rather than for the sake of exclusion itself."

"Equal treatment should mean that the Walking on Water Club enjoys the same latitude that other clubs may have in determining who is qualified to lead the club," the appeals court concluded.

Judge vows to keep praying in his courtroom

GADSDEN, AL (BP)—Etowah County (Ala.) Circuit Judge Roy S. Moore has vowed to defy a ruling prohibiting prayer in his courtroom, no matter what the circumstances.

In a nationally publicized case, Circuit Judge Charles Price upheld Moore's right to display the Ten Commandments in his Gadsden courtroom but banned prayers before jury summons in any Alabama courtroom. Price said courtroom prayers violated the First Amendment.

Moore, however, said he believes the ruling "warps" the U.S. Constitution. Although Moore was happy with the Ten Commandments decision, he believes the ban on prayer violates his right to acknowledge God. "I will not take down the Ten Commandments, and I will not stop prayer," he declared in a press conference after the decision. He plans to appeal the case.

High court agrees to settle dispute over Internet restrictions

WASHINGTON (ABP)—The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to settle a dispute over how far Congress can go in restricting indecent material on the Internet.

Setting up what is expected to be a major free-speech decision, justices announced they will review a lower-court ruling that blocked enforcement of a new law which criminalizes the sending of "indecent" and "patently offensive" communications to minors via the Internet.

The new law, known as the Communications Decency Act of 1996 (CDA), was included in a sweeping telecommunications reform package signed by President Clinton in February. Civil-liberties groups, on-line computer services, librarians and publishers challenged the law as violating the First Amendment.

In June, a special three-judge panel blocked enforcement of the CDA restrictions. CDA provided prison terms of up to two years and fines of up to \$250,000 for persons who knowingly transmit "indecent" or "patently offensive" material to persons under 18. The panel ruled that the law unconstitutionally restricted free speech.

Advocacy groups criticize television ratings system

NASHVILLE, TN (BP)—A plan to implement a sex-and-violence ratings system for television — covering cartoons to soap operas — is being met with skepticism by children's advocacy groups.

The plan, announced Dec. 19 by Jack Valenti of the Motion Picture Association of America, would categorize shows as: TV-Y (for all children), TV-Y7 (inappropriate for children under 7), TV-G (for general audiences not specifically children), TV-PG (parental guidance urged), TV-14 (not for children under 14) and TV-M (adults over 17 only). ABC, NBC, CBS and FOX will implement the plan this month.

The Center for Media Education has called for a more detailed content-based ratings system of sex and violence scenes rather than an age-based system. Such ratings would reveal the degree of sexual or violent content as well as offensive language.

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, the Children's Defense Fund, the National PTA, the American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics have joined in rejecting the new ratings system.

