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Arkansas Baptist moderates  
establish state fellowship

By Trennis Henderson

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Arkansas was officially established March 5 when approximately 100 participants gathered in Little Rock to adopt a constitution and bylaws.

According to Billy White, who was elected moderator of the group, "This obviously has been a long time coming. There have been little fellowships of concern about the entire takeover process in the Southern Baptist Convention for several years."

The state Fellowship grew out of a more informal group known as the Arkansas Fellowship of Concerned Southern Baptists. The new organization will relate directly to the national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate group formed two years ago in response to ultraconservative control of the SBC.

"This is an official identification with the values that we share, including the central value of freedom," explained White, pastor of Second Baptist Church, Little Rock. "There is a need for us to sound the voice of freedom to remind us of the values that identify us as Southern Baptists."

According to the preamble to the state Fellowship's constitution, "As followers of Jesus Christ, we are free and faithful baptized believers. ... We recognize that all believers are priests unto God, able to know and do the will of God. Believers therefore are free to interpret and apply the Scriptures as they believe the Holy Spirit directs, and not according to ecclesiastical creeds or man-made documents."

The preamble goes on to affirm local church autonomy, voluntary cooperation, soul freedom, equality among believers and separation of church and state. "Our only purpose is God's will, our understanding of which is constantly growing," the preamble continues. "Our only claim is Christ. Our only power is His love."

The constitution states that the purpose of the fellowship "Is to enable the people of God to carry out the Great Commission under the Lordship of

Jesus Christ, in a fellowship where every Christian exercises God's gifts and calling."

"Nothing has really changed," remarked White, who also is a member of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention Executive Board. "We're still Southern Baptists and members of Southern Baptist churches. ... It's still a fellowship. It's not a denomination or convention. We're not trying to set up a competing business."

Concerning relationships on the state level, White added, "My personal goals are that we stay involved. We are Arkansas Baptists. As far as I know, there is no intention or desire to be anything but that."

Emphasizing that fellowship members have not felt excluded on the state level, White explained that the group's actions are in response to "national-level concerns."

In addition to adopting a constitution and bylaws and electing White as moderator, participants elected Judith Strother of Mountain Home as moderator-elect and Bo Bames of Little Rock as secretary/treasurer. They also elected an 18-member coordinating council from eight cities across the state.

The program included two sessions which featured a report from Grayson Tennison, who served as interim missions coordinator for the national CBF, and a keynote address by national CBF coordinator Cecil Sherman. The meeting was Sherman's second official visit to Arkansas in two months.

Affirming the CBF's "holistic approach" to missions, Tennison noted, "We are a global missions group. I trust the future will take us to all areas of the world where people have not heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. ... Missions begins where you are and doesn't stop until that message has circled the globe. This is our purpose."

Describing the nature of Scripture, Sherman said the Bible "is the objective unit of measure of God's voice in all time." Noting that the key question answered by the Bible is "how can I know God?" Sherman said, "It is set up to answer the big question. That is why we are the people who stay in touch with Scripture."

"In these days, there are those who would relieve you of the burden of (biblical) interpretation. They will do it for you," Sherman cautioned. "They also would steal from us our birthright."

Affirming the importance of "Baptists acting like Baptists," he emphasized that biblical interpretation "is a process devised by Baptists out of great pain."

White said his personal involvement in Fellowship activities "is an expression of my following Christ. I see it as an expression of how I understand the gospel I was raised with and was converted by and that is still at work in my life."

Encouraging participants to attend the national CBF general assembly May 13-15 in Birmingham, Ala., White concluded, "We want people to know there is a place for them where they can come and be themselves without leaving the Southern Baptist family."

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Nude drawing class cancelled  
by Baylor after protests

By Toby Druin

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Bowing to a deluge of complaints from Texas Baptists, including a request from the state convention's Executive Board, Baylor University's Board of Regents voted unanimously March 19 to cancel a

nude figure-drawing class scheduled to be offered this fall.

The regents scrapped the class, previously approved by their academic affairs committee, after an avalanche of phone calls and letters protesting the class was received by university administrators, the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Baptist Standard newspaper.

The class, to be offered to advanced art and pre-med students, was approved last Nov. 6 by the regents committee but was not revealed until the Baylor student newspaper, The Lariat, released it Feb. 25. A subsequent story in the Baptist Standard, Texas Baptists' weekly newspaper, March 10 brought the storm of protest.

On March 16, three days before the regents' spring meeting, the Texas Baptist Executive Board, overwhelmingly passed a motion asking the Baylor board to consider the "views and convictions" of Texas Baptists in their decision about the class and in future decisions in light of the university's "expressed intent ... to be a major university distinctively Christian and unapologetically Baptist."

Baylor's relationship with the convention and its intention to remain "unapologetically Baptist" were brought into question in September 1990 when the university board changed its charter to end direct control by the convention. A new relationship subsequently was approved between the convention and university last fall which gives the convention direct election of only six of the university's 24 regents.

Baylor administration maintained, however, during the two-year dispute that followed the charter change that the school would remain "Baptist" in spite of the loss of convention control.

Opponents of the charter change and the new relationship contended it would lead to a move by the university away from its Baptist moorings. They and many others renewed the charge when news of the nude figure-drawing class broke.

Levi Price, chairman of the Texas Baptist Executive Board and a pastor from El Paso, said complaints about the class had come from both sides of the denominational political controversy. Baylor receives almost \$4 million from the state convention Cooperative Program allocations, almost all directed to student aid. But threats were made by many Texas churches to end Cooperative Program support if the class were offered.

Michael Bishop, Baylor vice president for communications and marketing, announced the regents' decision to cancel the class. "We have heard clearly the voices of Texas Baptists and many others, and we have cancelled any plan to offer the proposed course."

"We appreciate the viewpoints that have been expressed concerning this course. Our first commitment is to a Christian ministry in higher education, and we are not going to permit a single course to divide us from our Baptist family nor to distract us from our mission of offering the finest academic programs within a distinctively Christian and Baptist tradition."

Bishop noted that the action by the regents in scrapping the class was the first by the full board on the issue; the class previously had been approved by a committee of the board.

William Pinson, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, expressed appreciation for the regents' action.

"I am grateful that the Baylor board in its action was responsive to the concerns expressed by Texas Baptists and the Executive Board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas," he said. "I pray that as Texas Baptists we can concentrate on making and maturing disciples for the Lord Jesus Christ, working together for the sake of the gospel."

Ruschlikon president Hopper  
to undergo heart treatment

RUSCHLIKON, Switzerland (ABP) -- John David Hopper, president of the Baptist Theological Seminary, Ruschlikon, will relinquish leadership of the seminary temporarily to undergo treatment for a heart problem.

Hopper and his wife, Jo Ann, left Switzerland March 22 for the United States, where he will undergo cardiovascular examinations and possible heart-valve surgery.

Wiard Popkes, chairman of Ruschlikon's board of trustees, said Earl Martin will serve as "deputy president" of the seminary during Hopper's absence, expected to be no longer than five months. Martin, a former Southern Baptist missionary and Ruschlikon professor, will have full powers of the presidency, Popkes said.

"I have every confidence that the seminary will be in good hands under Dr. Martin's leadership," Hopper said as he prepared to leave the campus.

The Ruschlikon seminary was affiliated with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board until 1991, when FMB trustees discontinued funding for the school in a dispute over alleged liberalism.

Hopper had planned to receive treatment in the United States during the summer. Those plans were accelerated after Swiss doctors strongly recommended he seek further medical advice and care before summer.

Popkes emphasized the continued need for Hopper to return to Ruschlikon. "Certainly we expect him back for the fall semester this year," the chairman said. "He has gained a very high reputation among European Baptists through the many years of his service in Europe. He has become an integral part of the European Baptist fellowship. Our sincere prayer is for his quick return to Ruschlikon. We need him here."

Martin and his wife, Jane, served for 31 years under appointment with the Foreign Mission Board, most of those years in Africa. In 1982 they returned to the states, where Martin taught at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Martin went to Ruschlikon in 1987, where he helped found the seminary's Institute for Mission in Europe. He retired in 1992 but returned to Ruschlikon in March 1993 to serve as interim director of the institute.

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-- By Stanley Crabb

White's departure may improve  
church-state law, Baptists say

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Associate Justice Byron White's decision to leave the U.S. Supreme Court at the end of this term opens the door for an improvement in church-state law, according to three Baptist court observers.

White, who gravitated to the right on a range of issues during his 31-year tenure, announced March 19 that he will step down this summer.

While the White House has not released a list of prospects for the post, President Bill Clinton is widely expected to replace White with a nominee who would help thwart, if not reverse, the court's rightward direction.

White, 75, was appointed in 1962 by President John Kennedy. He was viewed then as a moderate but increasingly over the years has sided with the

court's conservatives.

He generally has favored a "low wall" of separation between church and state and thinks the court has gone too far in advancing abortion rights.

"In church-state law, Justice White is less of a conservative than he is a justice who has tended to uphold whatever the state chose to do with respect to religion," said Oliver Thomas, general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee. "He has grown increasingly hostile toward both the free exercise of religion and the separation of church and state."

Thomas noted that White would allow more government promotion of religion and is unwilling to stop government from interfering with religious practices.

"In short, he is not a separationist and his departure from the court opens the door for improvement in church-state law," Thomas said.

Stan Hastey, who covered the Supreme Court as a Baptist journalist for 15 of White's 31 years on the bench, also noted White's movement to the right.

"Justice White, like some other justices, didn't turn out to be the kind of jurist that people thought he might be at the time of his elevation to the court," said Hastey, now executive director of the Alliance of Baptists. "He became more and more comfortable with a legal philosophy that in my judgment gives the state inordinate power over individual freedom.

"Toward the end of his career, he had become a reliable vote for what I would consider the anti-separationist point of view with respect to church-state issues and generally supportive of governmental power over individual freedoms in a number of areas."

Hastey said he is hopeful White's departure means that some balance in the First Amendment field may be restored.

In recent Supreme Court decisions on emotionally volatile church-state and abortion issues, White sided with the court's conservatives.

One of two dissenters in the landmark 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* decision that affirmed the constitutional right of women to an abortion, White has steadfastly opposed that ruling. Last year he joined Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Associate Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas in dissenting from a decision that reaffirmed the essential ruling of *Roe vs. Wade*.

In a 1991 case, White, along with Rehnquist, Scalia and Thomas, strongly objected to the court's decision to strike down a Rhode Island school district's commencement prayer practice.

A year earlier, he had helped form a narrow 5-4 majority in *Employment Division vs. Smith* that reversed decades of precedent by holding that government no longer needed a compelling reason to justify a restriction on religious practice.

While encouraged that White may be replaced by a justice who favors church-state separation, Brent Walker, associate general counsel at the BJC, said White's retirement may not be immediately noticed in some church-state cases.

"Even if he is succeeded by a separationist, the vote on the issues in the *Smith* case would still likely be 5-4 because Justice Thomas, who replaced Justice (Thurgood) Marshall, probably would vote with the majority," Walker said.

Walker noted that while the tenuous 5-4 majority in the commencement-prayer case would be strengthened if White is replaced by a separationist, the outcome of the case would remain the same.

Nonetheless, Walker said, "The appointment of someone who believes in rigorously enforcing both religious clauses is indeed good news for the years ahead."

In announcing his decision to retire, White described his service on the court as interesting and exciting. "But after 31 years, Marion (his wife) and I think that someone else should be permitted to have a like experience."

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Will Americans succeed  
in the great experiment?

By Pam Parry

ARLINGTON, Va. (ABP) -- America's great experiment -- the First Amendment -- still works but faces chilling challenges in an increasingly pluralistic society, according to speakers at a March 16-17 symposium on religious liberty.

In a keynote address, former U.S. Rep. John Buchanan, a Baptist, applauded America's pluralism: "We are not just a melting pot. We are a rich mosaic."

But it's exactly that multiculturalism that makes the debate of religion and the public schools that much harder to settle, other speakers said.

The two-day conference, sponsored by the Freedom Forum's First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, was held at the Freedom Forum's headquarters in Arlington, Va., and drew more than 100 invited guests from the fields of education, law and religion.

Two keynote speakers and participants on four panels focused on three segments of society that relate to religion: government, public education and minority communities.

Warren Burger, former chief justice of the Supreme Court, said Americans enjoy a protection against governmental interference in religion that is equal to any in the world and better than most.

Oliver Thomas, a panel moderator and general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, said the Founding Fathers who framed the First Amendment of the Constitution made a deliberate choice to accommodate religion.

That choice, he said, is demonstrated in the First Amendment's two religion clauses -- one prohibiting the establishment of religion by the government and the other protecting the right of citizens to freely exercise their faith.

Thomas said there are few absolutes in life -- death, taxes, change and "the absolute nature of the free-exercise clause."

The religion clauses, Thomas reminded the audience, state that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. ..."

"No law," he emphasized. "A textual absolute is a rarity, but it's there."

The choice to accommodate religion was sustained by the U.S. Supreme Court until three years ago, Thomas added.

In the 1990 case of Oregon vs. Smith, the high court handed down the "Dred Scott" of First Amendment law, he said, referring to the infamous Dred Scott decision in 1857 that declared African-Americans were property and could not become citizens.

In Oregon vs. Smith, Justice Antonin Scalia called religious liberty a "luxury" this nation can no longer afford, Thomas recapped.

Thomas asked panel participants if government could still accommodate religion in a pluralistic society.

Beverly Campbell, director of international affairs for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, said Justice Scalia was wrong; the Bill of

Rights protects "principles not constituencies."

Abba Cohen, director of the Washington office of Agudath Israel of America, said, "Accommodating religion is simply good government. ... We have no choice but to accommodate religion."

If government must accommodate religion, it also must draw some lines, Thomas said. He asked panelists where the limits of accommodation would be.

Anuttama Dasa, director of communications, International Society of Krishna Consciousness, said that the government allows members of his religion to practice their faith in public locations, such as airports, but sets reasonable time, place and manner restrictions on those activities.

Other participants discussed the "compelling interest" test the court formerly required government to meet before restricting religious practices. In Smith, the court virtually abandoned that test, redrawing the line unfavorably toward religion, they said.

The solution, according to virtually everyone present, is the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. That bill (H.R. 1308, S. 578) would restore the compelling-interest test. It is pending in House and Senate committees.

Charles Haynes, another panel moderator and executive director of the First Liberty Institute at George Mason University, said the real question is how Americans live with their deepest differences. He said public schools are besieged on all sides.

Haynes suggested the first step is changing the debate on religion in school. He said he would eliminate the "shouting extremes." Most Americans can agree on an approach that treats religion fairly while safeguarding liberty of conscience, he said.

Steve McFarland, director of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom, said, "We need a mass public education in the First Amendment" because too many people view the establishment clause as "an unfortunate hurdle."

Diane Berreth, deputy executive director of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, said that it is wrong for schools to instill faith in students but it is the school's responsibility "to teach the truth about religion's place in our society."

She said that national standards are being established that will help educators infuse the role of religion in art, literature, history and science for all grade levels.

She said teaching about religion in public schools does not mean imparting religious values but rather imparting the academic truth about religion's role in shaping America's history.

Pearl Mattenson of the Anti-Defamation League said the ADL has concerns about this approach to teaching, however. The ADL is concerned about who will write the curriculum on each faith group and who will set the standards. Whether or not public school teachers are capable of teaching about a broad range of religious faiths also concerns the ADL, said Mattenson, who works with the ADL's A World of Difference Institute as director of education for the Eastern states.

Berreth said some teachers are doing a good job teaching about religion and that others would need more training.

Sharifa Alkhateeb, president of the North American Council for Muslim Women, said that teachers would have to be trained to "teach religion without prescribing religion."

McFarland countered that the public school cannot pretend religion is "academically irrelevant" or another generation of Americans will grow up with "Hollywood versions of other faiths."

The Freedom Forum, which sponsored the symposium through its First Amendment Center, is the nation's largest media-oriented foundation.

Originally the Gannett Foundation, it is one of the nation's largest funding sources of journalism education.

Charles Overby, Freedom Forum president, called the symposium historic since it was the First Amendment Center's first conference devoted to the Constitution's religion clauses. The center has focused primarily on free press and free speech issues in the past, he said.

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Trustees of Richmond seminary OK  
new faculty, \$1.3 million budget

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Trustees of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond approved the hiring of two new faculty members and passed a \$1.3 million budget during their meeting March 15-16.

Approved were Samuel Balentine to be professor of Old Testament and Cleophus LaRue Jr. to be assistant professor of preaching.

Balentine has been associate professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., since 1983. He taught Old Testament and Hebrew at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., from 1979 to 1983. He is teaching one course as a visiting professor at BTRSR this spring and will begin teaching full-time in the fall.

Balentine holds a master of divinity degree from Southeastern Seminary, where he graduated with high honors, and a doctor of philosophy from Oxford University. He has published a book, *The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament*, and numerous articles, and has presented papers at regional, national and international meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, at Princeton Theological Seminary, and at other universities.

LaRue, an African-American, is a candidate for the doctor of philosophy degree in preaching at Princeton Theological Seminary. He already holds a master of divinity degree from Princeton. He has served as pastor of Baptist churches in Texas for 13 years and worked as a news reporter for K-III TV in Corpus Christi, Texas.

While a pastor in Waco, Texas, for 10 years, LaRue was active in the local chapter of the NAACP, the interdenominational ministerial association, and the Waco Conference of Christian and Jews. He is related to the National Baptist Convention of America and the National Baptist Convention, USA.

LaRue, who is in great demand as a preacher, will teach adjunctively during 1993-94 while finishing his dissertation. He will become a full-time faculty member in the fall of 1994.

Tom Graves, BTRSR president, told trustees the seminary is interviewing candidates for faculty positions in pastoral care and to head the seminary's congregational-based theological education program. The additions of Balentine, LaRue and the two to be named this spring will give the school 10 full-time faculty members a year ahead of schedule.

Trustees also approved a fiscal 1993-94 budget of \$1.3 million, a third more than the current year's. Largest institutional donors will be the Baptist General Association of Virginia and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Both groups in recent months formalized relationships with the seminary in which they nominate trustee candidates to the BTRSR board.

Gifts from churches and individual donors also are to supply a sizeable portion of the budget. The sale of a parcel of land which was given to the seminary last December by BTRSR trustee Nell Pucoy and her husband, Paul, is

projected to provide more than \$100,000.

Other major funding will come indirectly through grants from the Charles B. Keesee Educational Fund, a foundation that gives tuition aid to students from North Carolina and Virginia planning to enter Baptist ministry.

Trustees also elected new officers and expressed appreciation to outgoing chairperson Mary Strauss, who became the board's first chairperson in 1989. New chairperson is Elmer West, a former pastor who lives in Richmond, Va.

Trustees presented a resolution of appreciation to Page Kelley, retired Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor who taught Old Testament at BTSR this fall. A mild stroke in January prevented Kelley from completing the year.

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-- By Beth McMahon

Students at Richmond seminary  
explore missions in Mexico

By Beth McMahon

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Students from the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond found themselves called upon to move mountains during a recent trip to Mexico -- mountains of dirt, that is.

The earth-moving project was part of a month-long Mission Immersion Experience sponsored by the seminary through Virginia Baptists' Mission Partnership with Mexico City. Immersion came in many forms, including doing manual labor, living among students at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Mexico, and visiting a variety of Mexican Baptist churches.

The 11 BTSR students were the first to participate in the mission course, which is required of all BTSR students with the goal of allowing them to experience life and ministry in another culture. They returned with a variety of insights into Mexican life, culture and Christianity, and into themselves, as well.

Two construction projects on the campus of the Mexican seminary yielded the most tangible results of the trip: 10 wooden bed frames for use in the dorms and a new parking area. Team members used only hand tools to grade the parking area, haul a large pile of dirt out of the way and mix concrete.

At first some team members felt their ministry gifts were not being effectively used, said BTSR student Vicki Lumpkin. But, she said, when they realized that such volunteer work helps keep tuition costs down at the Mexican seminary, their attitudes changed. "In some way we were helping our friends at the seminary to be able to follow God's call for their lives," she said.

"The most difficult thing for me was to walk down the sidewalk with my clothes dirty and my hair stringy from working and pass the Mexican students in their suits and ties," said student Rachel Lynch. "It was a humbling experience. But it gave me a new appreciation for the many people in Mexico who have to work at physical labor without many of the conveniences we would have in the states."

And the sometimes exhausting labor yielded spiritual insights, as well.

"We went there trying to indicate we had accepted a servant role," said mission professor Isam Ballenger, who led the class. "In doing this extremely hard physical work we were deprived of our usual roles. We were not teachers or students -- we were day laborers. That allowed us to identify to an

amazing extent with the Mexican day laborers who worked with us on the concrete."

Living on the seminary campus let Richmond students get to know Mexican students well, and Mexican students befriended the team in many ways.

Three Mexican students invited team member Joe Womack to share their small dorm room when housing space ran short. "They had remarkable faith," Womack said.

"They went from month to month in terms of payment to the seminary, and they never knew where the money was going to come from. But their attitude was, 'If I am a faithful in the present moment, God will provide for the future.'

"They weren't worried about jobs or retirement plans or whatever. There was a sense of serenity about them, a sense of each day being sufficient unto itself."

Another Mexican student who came from a very poor background demonstrated the same kind of warmth. "When we gave her a seminary T-shirt and coffee mug, she asked us what our favorite colors were," said Lynch. "The next day she brought articles of her own clothing to give to us as souvenirs."

The B TSR team visited in a variety of churches in and around Mexico City, some of them served by students from the Mexican seminary.

Womack recalled one small house church he visited. "It was very evident that people had come there to worship," he said. "There was no sense of 'We've got to be out of here by noon.'

"There was one long prayer, maybe 30 minutes long, in which I understood about three words, and during it I felt the closest to God I think I've ever felt. There was a real sense of the Spirit at work."

Lumpkin noted services generally incorporated many testimonies, music and prayer request times. "This gave worship a very personal, intimate feel, tailored to the needs of the people. Being a minority as Baptists, they are persecuted, and things are rough."

For Lumpkin, a visit to the Basilica de Guadalupe, a Catholic shrine to the Virgin Mary, provided a stark contrast to the joy expressed in the Mexican Baptists' worship.

"We went there for evening mass, and people were crawling across the cobbled floor to approach the altar on their knees, seeking a special blessing or miracle," she said. "It was sobering to see that people felt they had to earn God's blessing and grace by doing these self-destructive, painful things. It was very much in contrast with the joy and singing of the other churches we visited."

Francesca Nuzzolese, a B TSR Italian exchange student from the Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, found the Mexicans' faith different from that found in any of the three countries in which she has lived.

"I used to think God is the same for everybody, but now I realize God really means something else to them because of the poverty and hardship of living as a Christian in their country," she said. "They depend on God much more than we do, because we have what we need and they don't."

Crossing cultures highlighted other differences between Mexico and the United States.

"They have an amazing ability to take what's on their plate and work with it rather than resisting, an ability to adjust to life as it comes," said Womack. "I found a spiritual lesson for myself in that attitude of just taking what's given rather than being mad at God and others because things don't come out exactly the way I want them to."

Some church buildings illustrated this same relaxed approach to life,

Lumpkin recalled.

She visited one church built with unpainted cement blocks and unfinished concrete pillars with reinforcing rods sticking out. It was being built little by little as money came in. Another had an attractively finished sanctuary, but Sunday school classes met outdoors under large tarpaulins.

Lumpkin said these "works in progress" were seen by the church members as gifts of God. "It was wonderful to see people who didn't have to have everything perfect and have it right now."

Several students said the experience shaped their thinking about missions.

"My understanding of missions," said Francesca Nuzzolese, "is that you first put yourself on the same level as the people and then talk about God. Don't talk about God from above, from a privileged position."

Rachel Lynch said she earlier felt called to career missions, but that dream seemed thwarted when she was divorced. A comment from a Mexican Baptist friend during a crowded subway ride challenged that assessment, Lynch said. "He said, 'If you really want to be a missionary, stand in the Metro station and look around. When you can love all the people in this train, then you're ready to be a missionary.'"

"Scripture is filled with the stories of struggling people and the story of what God did for them," she said. "I was challenged to broaden my view of my own calling, to be open to wherever God leads me."

Crossing cultures also affirmed an awareness that God works throughout the world, said Womack. "Seeing what the Christian faith meant to a group of students in another culture, many of whom had come from difficult backgrounds, was very powerful."

"If we stay in just one culture, our God is too small," Womack said.

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