

# Associated Baptist Press

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August 31, 1995

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## **NCAA decision to penalize prayer leaves some Christians up in arms**

By Greg Warner

SHAWNEE MISSION, Kan. (ABP) -- Should football players be penalized for kneeling to pray after scoring a touchdown? The NCAA says "yes." But some Christian athletes say "no way!" and will take the NCAA to court.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association, which governs college athletics, is cracking down on what it calls excessive celebration in football -- taunting, showboating, dancing, spiking the football and any other "delayed, excessive or prolonged act by which a player attempts to focus attention upon himself."

But prayer?

Yes, according to a videotape distributed by the NCAA, which is based in Shawnee Mission, Kan., to explain the crackdown.

The video depicted several behaviors that will be penalized. One of those examples was a player kneeling and "obviously praying," said Gregg Summers, NCAA assistant director of publications and staff liaison to the committee.

It's the kneeling -- not the praying -- that will draw a penalty flag, Summers said.

If a player quickly bows his head or crosses himself after breaking the end zone and is circling to join his teammates, that would not be a violation of the rules, Summers said. But when a player kneels or runs to the corner of the end zone and bows his head, that would be a violation, because that player is isolating himself for attention.

The NCAA is not launching a "prohibition against prayer," Summers insisted. The video and the rule itself never mention prayer, he said, but the NCAA football rules committee decided not to allow any kneeling regardless of the intent.

In fact, players still can pray on the field if they do it the right way, said Grant Teaff, former Baylor University football coach and executive director of the American Football Coaches Association.

Teaff helped the NCAA committee draft the disputed rule -- Rule 9-2-1-a -- despite the fact he is an outspoken Christian and former national chairman of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

"You can pray any time you want to, but you can't bring attention to yourself after the play is over," Grant

said. "It has to do with consistency in applying the rules."

But football players and administrators at Liberty University don't see it that way. They filed suit Aug. 31 in U.S. district court against the NCAA to block enforcement of the rule, which they say interferes with the players' free expression of religion.

"I feel its my right and opportunity to give thanks to God, and I want kids across America to know there is a higher power," Antwan Chiles, a Liberty football player and one of four student plaintiffs in the lawsuit, said in a Aug. 31 news conference.

"College football players have the same right to religious free expression as every other American, and that right cannot be abridged when they step onto the field," said John Whitehead, a lawyer and president of the Rutherford Institute, a religious-liberty group representing Liberty and its players in the lawsuit.

The lawsuit says Liberty's football stadium is a "public accommodation" under Title II of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. Therefore, stadium officials must permit players or anyone else to pray.

But other Christians -- like Brent Walker, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee -- couldn't get agitated over the prayer action.

"The NCAA isn't trying to keep players from praying. No one can do that," said Walker. "They've only outlawed hot-dogging. ... I think the whole rule is dumb. Let the players play. Let them celebrate. And, if they wish, let them pray."

Bobby Bowden, coach of the 1994 national champion Florida State Seminoles, said he can live with the rule. "It's just one of those things where if all those other things are ruled out, I guess they ought to rule that [prayer] out too," said Bowden, a member of First Baptist Church in Tallahassee, Fla. "I understand what the NCAA is doing."

"You don't have to kneel to pray, do you?" asked Bowden. "The NCAA is not taking prayer away just because you can't kneel."

Mark DeMoss, a spokesman for Liberty University and its founder, Jerry Falwell, said allowing inconspicuous prayer -- like bowing your head as you run through the end zone -- is not enough. "You can do that in China. It's like a public restaurant saying you can pray but only in the restroom."

Others say Christians shouldn't put their prayers on public display. After all, they say, Jesus instructed his followers to "enter into your closet" to pray and avoid the showy, public prayers of the "hypocrites" (Matthew 6).

"What Christian who takes Matthew 6:5-6 seriously would want to make a spectacle of his prayer anyway?" said Walker of the Baptist Joint Committee.

DeMoss said the Liberty players don't pray for public attention. "They don't think they are calling attention to themselves. ... This is a serious and sincere issue with these guys. It's not showboating. It's an outward expression of their faith."

"If anyone has a need to be thankful it's me," said Kris Bouslough, another of the Liberty plaintiffs. "I don't even deserve to play football because I've had two knee surgeries. But I don't think its right for someone to deny me the right to thank God."

Andre Cooper, a wide receiver for Florida State and no stranger to the end zone, defended the right of players to pray. "I usually wait until I get to the sideline to do my thing, but I still think it's unfair to those guys who sincerely give thanks to the Lord for giving them the opportunity to play football," Cooper told the Florida Times-Union.

Ironically, for many spiritually inclined players, the end-zone prayer emerged as an antidote to the showboating and self-aggrandizement that the NCAA now is trying to eliminate. But the NCAA, apparently recognizing the difficulties of either outlawing prayer or specifically permitting it, instead targeted all conspicuous behavior.

"The policy was not directed at prayer," said Don Hilkemeier of Kansas City, Mo., senior vice president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. "Because the NCAA specifically addressed the kneeling, our position is we would follow that rule. ... Had it been directed at prayer, our position probably would have been different."

It would be difficult to regulate prayer anyway, Hilkemeier said. "When the cameras show someone in prayer

at a game, there's no way for anyone to know what's in his heart."

Hilkemeier said several FCA leaders -- including coaches Kenny Hatfield of Rice University and Fisher DeBerry of the Air Force Academy -- served on the committee that approved the rule.

He said the rule does allow spontaneous expressions of enthusiasm but not planned ones. And only individual demonstrations are targeted. "If the whole team meets for prayer in the end zone, our interpretation is that would not be a violation," he said.

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-- Pam Parry contributed to this story.

## **Former Baylor star sees both sides of prayer issue**

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Derek Davis, a football player turned church-state specialist, said he has "mixed feelings" about the NCAA's crackdown on end-zone prayer.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association will penalize football players for taunting, showboating, dancing, spiking the football or other "excessive celebration," but that also will affect those players who kneel in prayer after scoring a touchdown.

Davis said NCAA officials are trying to reduce grandstanding and promote teamwork -- "something that is very good" -- but they are treading on something very sacred, the right to pray.

"From a legal standpoint, this is a very close question," said Davis, an attorney and director of the J. M. Dawson Institute for Church-State Studies at Baylor University. "It may become a free-exercise-of-religion issue."

"It's easy for us to kind of snicker and say people are making too much out of this, but the free exercise of religion is a fundamental value that we don't want to encroach upon," he said.

Davis, a former Baylor team captain and all-conference wide receiver, said he found the end zone a few times during his playing days (1967-70) but never did much celebrating. "I had a less demonstrative personality. I tended to throw the ball back to the referee." But Davis said he did pray -- on the field and on the sidelines.

The NCAA should distinguish between showboating, which clearly is intended to attract attention, and prayer, which usually is not, he said. "The nature of prayer is someone subordinating himself to the one above. ... I see that as being an act different from a 10-second dance after scoring a touchdown."

The concern over end-zone celebrations, Davis said, is part of an age-old debate between the importance of the individual and the value for community. "If we could resurrect Plato and Aristotle; they would be applauding this kind of rule," he quipped. "On the other hand, John Locke and Immanuel Kant would be very concerned about the suppression of personal expression."

Americans value both individual achievement and team play, Davis said, which produces tension. The NCAA is "moving in the right direction" away from personal aggrandizement, he said, but it needs to make some allowances for prayer.

"American society would be better served if we would let our football payers put a knee to the ground and pray," he said. "I don't see any problem with that. That is a positive and not a negative. The question is where do you draw the line."

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-- By Greg Warner

## WMU leaders 'furious' with Rankin letter

By Bob Allen

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Leaders of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union are "furious" with a critical letter written by Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin, according to a statement issued Aug. 31.

Rankin's letter, dated Aug. 25 and mailed to about 40,000 pastors, WMU directors and other Southern Baptists, "is inflammatory, misleading and divisive," said Dellanna O'Brien, executive director of the Birmingham, Ala.-based WMU.

"We are furious with the letter," she said.

In the mass mailing, which an FMB spokesperson said cost about \$11,500, Rankin criticized the WMU's national leaders for their recent decision to produce specialized materials for use in churches that support the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The Atlanta-based Fellowship offers moderate alternatives to official denominational programs run by conservatives who gained control of the nation's largest Protestant group during the 1980s.

Rankin termed the WMU decision "counterproductive" to the Southern Baptist Convention's unified missions efforts and told Associated Baptist Press it departs from "what has been the historical relationship" between the 107-year-old women's auxiliary and the Southern Baptist Foreign and Home Mission boards.

WMU president Carolyn Miller of Huntsville, Ala., said she is "appalled" that Rankin would assume the action deviates the auxiliary from its traditional role. "We have never intended to change our relationship with the Foreign Mission Board nor our support for Southern Baptist missionaries," she said.

"Ninety-nine point nine percent of what we do is, and will remain, related to the (SBC) Home and Foreign Mission boards," O'Brien said. Rather than "promoting and publicizing" the Fellowship, as Rankin charged, "we are simply responding to a request from churches for materials which include information about what the CBF is doing in missions," she said.

The WMU will print and distribute the materials, Miller said, but the Fellowship, not WMU, will promote their use. The Fellowship supplements will be sent only to churches that order them. WMU magazines will continue to feature only Southern Baptist missionaries.

O'Brien predicted Rankin's letter "will have negative impact" on the 1995 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering by causing Southern Baptists to have "second thoughts about giving because of this new criticism from the Foreign Mission Board." The WMU and FMB are working together to promote an unprecedented \$100 million goal for the offering, which is the mission board's largest income source.

O'Brien also questioned a Rankin quote that he did not intend for the letter to drive a wedge between grass-roots WMU members and the organization's national leadership. "It would be difficult not to imagine that this was the purpose," she said.

She said the letter displayed an "apparent lack of understanding of the polity of WMU." Unlike SBC boards of trustees, which are chosen from regions of the country without any formal input from Baptist state conventions, the WMU Executive Board is made up of the elected presidents and employed executive directors representing the various state WMU organizations.

By taking his appeal to grass-roots pastors and WMU members, Rankin does not appear "to see the connection between local-church WMU members and the national organization," O'Brien said. "Is it possible that he does not know that these grass-roots members elect the members of WMU's Executive Board?"

Rankin sent copies of the letter to O'Brien, state WMU directors, FMB members, Baptist state paper editors, directors of missions, the president and chairman of the SBC Executive Committee and the 4,000 SBC foreign missionaries. O'Brien called it a "serious omission" that the letter was not also addressed to members of the WMU Executive Board, which, she pointed out, was erroneously termed "the WMU National Board" in Rankin's letter.

The Executive Board adopted a new WMU mission statement in 1993 permitting the auxiliary to produce resources for Southern Baptist groups on request. Executive Board members reaffirmed that commitment this summer when O'Brien informed them of the staff decision to produce materials for churches desiring to supplement their studies about SBC missionaries with information about missionaries appointed by the CBF.

O'Brien said WMU leaders learned about Rankin's letter from the press. Rankin called the WMU offices on Monday afternoon, Aug. 28, to inform leaders of the letter, but as of early Thursday, Aug. 31, O'Brien still had not received her official courtesy copy, she said.

Both O'Brien and June Whitlow, senior associate executive director of the WMU, were attending the Jericho missions festival at Ridgecrest, N.C., when FMB trustees meeting there encouraged Rankin to write the letter, she said, but Rankin "did not show the courtesy of discussing this action at the time it was taken."

Rankin told reporters he wrote the letter in part because WMU leaders had ignored concerns raised by the FMB when they decided to produce the study materials for the Fellowship.

O'Brien responded that the WMU Executive Board "has taken into consideration the concerns Dr. Rankin has put forward from time to time."

WMU leaders have also conveyed their own concerns about the FMB's recent forging of a relationship with Global Focus, a new, male-led organization that will develop innovative missions programs for Southern Baptist churches, she added.

The alliance "erodes confidence in the promotion and missions education efforts of WMU," O'Brien said. Unlike WMU, "these non-traditional methods have totally left out the significance of prayer support in favor of 'raising money' for missions," she said.

Miller noted that the FMB is more willing to work with non-Baptists than with the Fellowship, which is supported almost totally by churches which also continue to affiliate with the SBC.

"If the Foreign Mission Board can work with evangelical groups -- some of which have been viewed in years past as 'competing' with Southern Baptist efforts -- why cannot we work with a group of Southern Baptists?" Miller asked.

Postage costs for Rankin's letter were about \$9,500, said David Button, FMB vice president for public relations and development. Other costs not including staff time -- paper, printing and envelopes -- added another \$2,000, he estimated.

Jerry Helderman, a staff minister at First Baptist Church in Cary, N.C., said he perceived Rankin's letter as "another shove in pushing the WMU out of the Southern Baptist Convention."

"I support the WMU and their mission effort," Helderman said. "I cannot see any harm they are doing to the convention, but I can see a lot of good. We will continue to use the materials printed by the WMU."

Wayne Dorsett, pastor of Central Park Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., meanwhile, said while he has "nothing against the WMU," he is "in full support" of Rankin's letter.

Rankin's writing to local-church WMU directors was no different than when WMU leaders wrote SBC churches sharing their concerns about being left out of the original draft of a restructuring proposal by the blue-ribbon SBC Program and Structure Study Committee, Dorsett said.

"It seems to me that the WMU wants to have its cake and eat it too," Dorsett said.

Two years ago, when the SBC Executive Committee sought to stop WMU from opening doors to the Fellowship, WMU leaders appealed to their auxiliary status, Dorsett said. More recently, when the restructuring committee honored WMU's request for autonomy and left them out of the restructuring proposal, "Then they cry and say, 'Wait a minute, how could you have left us out?'"

"My question is, 'Which is it? Do you want to be an auxiliary and have us treat you as an auxiliary, ... or do you want to be included in the loop of the structure?'" he asked.

"Frankly, anytime anybody says something about the WMU, I'm tired of WMU whining, 'You're trying to exclude us, you're trying to undermine us.' It's a little bit wearying to me, because it's pretty predictable," Dorsett said.

## **Baptist man wins settlement from Wal-Mart over Sunday work**

BOLIVAR, Mo. (ABP) -- Wal-Mart Stores Inc. is under a court order to train its 2,200 store managers to avoid religious discrimination as a term of an out-of-court settlement reached with a former employee who sued after being forced to work Sundays.

Wal-Mart paid an undisclosed sum to Scott Hamby of Bolivar, Mo., and agreed to a seven-part plan to make managers aware of the religious rights of employees. The nation's largest department-store chain denied any wrongdoing and blamed the dispute on a mistake by a manager.

"David got Goliath in this one," said Hamby's attorney, Jay Kirksey of Bolivar, Mo.

The Wall Street Journal predicted the outcome of the Hamby case "could have far-reaching implications for other companies with weekend staffing needs that conflict with workers' religious practices."

Hamby, 23, a Southern Baptist, worked part-time in the electronics department of the Bolivar Wal-Mart in 1993 when the county repealed Missouri's "blue laws," allowing the store to open on Sundays.

Hamby said he told supervisors he preferred not to work on Sundays for religious reasons but was shown a document from a district manager stating all employees must be available to work on Sundays. After working several Sundays, he said he offered to work one Sunday a month in order to keep his job.

Hamby's said his supervisor verbally agreed to the compromise. When he was scheduled for a second Sunday, however, the person responsible for scheduling employees told him she was unaware of any agreement. She later testified the manager told her, "Schedule Scott on Sunday until he quits."

Hamby sued in November 1993, alleging religious discrimination under Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act. The original suit sought \$5 million in damages, Hamby said, "but our purpose was not the money, it was to prevent this from happening to someone else."

Christians "have kind of become known as pushovers" with regards to standing up for legal rights, said Hamby, a member of Southern Hills Baptist Church in Bolivar who plans a career as a police officer and a bivocational evangelist.

Kirksey, the attorney, said he believes the settlement will have far-reaching impact. Title VII deals with discrimination on the basis of race, sex or religion, he pointed out, but religious discrimination has received less attention than the other two types. "It looks like this will be the case that will catapult religious discrimination into the public awareness."

The law states that if a person has a bona fide religious conviction pertaining to some aspect of work, an employer must reasonably accommodate the employee's needs if this can be done without undue hardship to the employer.

That means basically the employer should use common sense, Kirksey explained. In Hamby's case, for example, there was no need for the store to force Hamby to work Sundays because it had plenty of other employees who were willing to do so.

Kirksey, who specializes in labor law, said typically a worker who is opposed to working on Sunday for religious reasons is either not hired, is fired or has his or her hours cut. This forces workers to choose between their religious convictions and feeding their families. "Title VII says that doesn't have to occur," Kirksey said.

The dismissal order states that Wal-Mart Stores Inc. denies any liability or wrongdoing in the case. Spokeswoman Jane Bockholt said the company agreed to a settlement because its local store manager had made a mistake. "We're human -- we sometimes make mistakes."

Bockholt said the corporation was complying with the settlement agreement by providing training in religious discrimination at its fall merchandise meetings, which are underway in Kansas City.

Baptist religious-liberty advocates welcomed the Wal-Mart settlement. "We certainly endorse the principle

of strengthening religious liberty in the workplace," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. He characterized the outcome of Hamby's case as "a non-legislative move in the right direction."

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-- By Tim Palmer

## **School officials get new tool to deal with religious expression**

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Local school officials caught in a cross-fire over the role of religion in public schools now have a new tool to aid them in dealing with the sensitive issue.

In mid-August, Secretary of Education Richard Riley mailed the nation's 15,000 school superintendents a set of guidelines to help local educators know the extent to which religious expression is permitted in public schools.

The mailing complied with President Clinton's July directive to Riley and Attorney General Janet Reno to make sure school officials understand that the Constitution does not make schools "religion-free zones."

Schools cannot "forbid students acting on their own from expressing their personal religious views or beliefs solely because they are of a religious nature," Riley wrote the superintendents in introducing a detailed set of guidelines.

At the same time, he wrote, "schools may not endorse religious activity or doctrine, nor may they coerce participation in a religious activity."

Riley emphasized at an Aug. 30 news conference that the principles communicated to the superintendents reflect the First Amendment's requirement that government neither establish religion nor prohibit its practice.

"This guidance reflects what we determined to be the current statement of the law," Riley told reporters, "and it is not intended to change anything."

He said the guidelines drew heavily from a statement of current law on religion in schools developed by a coalition of religious groups, including the American Jewish Congress, the Christian Legal Society, the National Association of Evangelicals and the Baptist Joint Committee.

The guidelines "won't solve all the problems," Riley said, but he hopes they "will end some of the confusion."

Riley called the action an effort to "encourage people to lower their voices" in the battle over religion in schools and "to come together for the good of the children who are there to learn."

Deputy Secretary of Education Madeleine Kunin said finding common ground in this controversy is important for children.

"School is a place where we should concentrate on education and not make it a battleground for these issues," she said.

The battle over religion in public schools has raged with various levels of intensity since the U.S. Supreme Court struck down school-sponsored religious exercises in the early 1960s.

Since then, school boards have been caught in the cross-fire, according to Gus Steinhilber, general counsel of the American School Boards Association.

"While we were not part of the development of the guidance, we were very pleased to see it produced," Steinhilber told reporters.

Steinhilber predicted the guidelines will lessen litigation over religion in schools.

"Most of the litigation we have right now and most of the problems we have are in the church-state field," he said, noting that disputes over religion in the schools outnumber those related to services for the handicapped

and sexual harassment.

"Hopefully, we are going to cut down the volume of conflict, and we can get about the education of children rather than getting involved in controversy," he said.

BJC General Counsel Brent Walker described for reporters how both proponents and opponents of a school-prayer amendment joined to draft a document detailing the types of student religious expression permitted under existing laws and court interpretations.

Walker said the ecumenical spirit demonstrated by the diverse groups in the project may be as important as the legal principles spelled out in the document, titled "Religion in the Public Schools: A Joint Statement of Current Law."

"The attempt to come together and find some common ground of agreement before we debated our differences ... may well serve as something of a model for others out in the country ... to talk to one another and come to some common agreement before one side or the other runs off to the courthouse or to the school board or to the county commission," Walker said.

Riley, Steinhilber and Walker said they oppose adding a religious-equality amendment to the Constitution.

After studying the issue, Riley said, "tampering with the First Amendment of the Constitution would be a mistake. By adding words to the Constitution, I think you really narrow the broad protections of the First Amendment."

Steinhilber said any attempt to change the Bill of Rights should be looked at carefully.

"This town is very political ... and some members of Congress ... love what I call 'feel good' legislation," he said. "The Bill of Rights is not the place for 'feel good' legislation."

Among religious groups urging Congress to approve a religious-equality amendment is the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. The CLC negotiated with the religious groups putting together the joint statement but eventually opted not to endorse it. A CLC spokesman later criticized the statement as a "scud missile" aimed at derailing a proposed school-prayer amendment.

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## **Churches launch Web sites to reach lost in cyberspace**

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Some Baptist churches and institutions are venturing into cyberspace to reach nerds, geeks, seekers and surfers -- not to mention just plain folks with computer modems.

"People on-line seem to fit the mold of the typical searcher who may believe some of Christianity, some of the psycho-theory spirituality, some New Age, some ancient wisdom and so forth," said Jeryl Hoover, pastor of Tarrytown Baptist Church in Austin, Texas.

"The good thing is that more and more people are wanting to discuss religion intelligently, like those Paul met on Mars Hill," he said. The Internet "is a God-given opportunity for those of us who want to engage those folks."

Hoover's church went on-line about five months ago, launching a home page on the Internet's World Wide Web. About 1,000 visitors have "signed" the church's electronic guest register.

The Internet is a global network of more than 40,000 interconnected computer networks in government agencies, universities and varied organizations. The World Wide Web system organizes the mishmash of Internet data. It is a shortcut that allows users to explore resources from multiple entry points by pointing and clicking a mouse on a key word or picture on a Web home page.

Tarrytown's home page is a colorful, stylized map of the church campus. Browsers can point and click

on such areas as "youth jam," "family park" or "kid zone," as well as an events calendar.

"We are definitely interested in reaching the 'outsider' by offering a non-threatening way of presenting the message," Hoover said.

And the Net can be a haven for outsiders. Commercial on-line services such as CompuServe -- carrier for SBCNet, a Baptist Sunday School Board-coordinated network with about 5,600 users -- are closely administered to keep them relatively "family friendly."

By contrast, content on the Internet currently is unregulated, although proposals for cleaning up cyberspace are pending in Congress. The Internet's "chat rooms" can be profane and some web sites contain pornographic images.

But the same anonymity that cyberspace offers to participants in sexually explicit chat rooms also is afforded to spiritual seekers, Hoover noted. Tarrytown plans to start an "apologetics forum" where Christian beliefs can be defended and explained to a non-Christian audience.

"I believe that the primary tool of evangelism in this decade is an articulate apologetic that is honest to compare Christianity to the other alternatives," Hoover said.

Although their numbers are still small, other Baptist churches are maintaining home pages. They range from the innovative Saddleback Valley Community Church in Lake Forest, Calif., to the inner-city East 7th Street Baptist Ministry, Graffiti, in New York, N.Y., to nearby University Baptist Church in Austin.

Baptist institutions also are setting up Web sites. Like many major schools, Baylor University in Waco, Texas, has a home page offering information to prospective students, as well as providing a link to other educational institutions.

Texas Baptist Children's Home launched its home page on the Web Aug. 1 as a way to "place our own billboard on the information superhighway," according to communications associate Chuck Lutke.

For both churches and institutions, the Internet offers a no-risk easy entry point for anyone wanting information.

Recently, Tarrytown Baptist Church received an inquiry from an Austin-area computer user who was "testing the waters" before visiting the church.

"He said his wife was a Christian, and he was wanting to get right with the Lord," Hoover recalled. "But he said, 'I smoke cigarettes and I drive a Harley. Would I be welcome in your church?' I tried to let him know our church wants to be open and accepting of everyone. He said he'd be here the first Sunday after Labor Day."

That was an unusual encounter, Hoover acknowledged. Currently, only about 12 percent of all households have access to the Internet. But Tarrytown wanted to "be in on the ground floor" of the emerging technology.

"At this point, it's not an effective marketing tool for gaining members," he said. "But we hope it will be a good tool for positioning the church in people's minds. We hope they will see the forum as a place where they can get straight answers to their questions."