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Fellowship must cast positive vision, Vestal says

By Bob Allen

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (ABP) -- For the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to grow, it must be more than a protest movement, says Daniel Vestal, the moderate group's new leader.

The Fellowship grew rapidly after forming in 1991 as moderates disenfranchised with a conservative takeover of the nation's largest non-Catholic faith group bought into the organization's alternative missions and ministry programs.

More recently, the number of churches giving to the Fellowship has leveled off. In January, giving only slightly ahead of totals a year ago forced a 10 percent mid-year budget slash for the national Fellowship organization.

"At the present we have reached something of a plateau," Vestal told a Feb. 21-22 meeting of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Florida in Daytona Beach, Fla..

A long transition between former Coordinator Cecil Sherman, who retired in June, and Vestal, who started in December, contributed to the slowdown in growth, Vestal said.

Beyond that, he added, "We have reached a level that represents a kind of leveling off from the protest of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Vestal said the Fellowship can no longer depend on fallout from the long battle between moderates and conservatives in the SBC to bring in large numbers of new contributors.

"I do think that there's an awful lot of people whose conscience has yet to be awakened," Vestal said. But, he added, "I think our future is going to be shaped by the way we cast a positive, compelling vision for Baptist Christians."

Vestal said he believes there is still room for growth in the Fellowship.

"I'm not one of those who says we are going to remain small," Vestal said. "I want to be committed to growth."

To attract new churches, he said, the Fellowship should promote itself as an organization with "real integrity," emphasize the group's innovative missions program and "energize and strengthen" the 15 state and regional CBF groups that work alongside the national Fellowship.

"I believe increasingly Baptists are going to be drawn to us," Vestal said.

The Florida Fellowship is a loose network of about 50 churches with a 5,500-name mailing list and an annual budget of \$300,000. Its state mission work is focused on starting new churches and two ongoing projects in Miami, said state Fellowship Coordinator Patrick Anderson.

"We see the Miami area as the greatest mission field we know of maybe anywhere in the United States and certainly in Florida," said Anderson, a college professor from Lakeland.

Anderson called the Florida Fellowship group a "people who are committed to the Bible" who "really do try to take the gospel of Christ to the least of the least."

"We try to be true to those who join hands in time across the ages who have tried to have an authentic witness of the Christian walk," Anderson said.

Bob Mulkey, pastor of First Baptist Church in DeLand, is new moderator of the Florida Fellowship, succeeding outgoing moderator Isabel Saint-Gaudens of Miami.

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FDA says birth control pills safe for 'morning-after' use

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Food and Drug Administration said Feb. 24 that specific doses of oral contraceptives can be used as "morning-after" birth-control pills.

The agency said that based on scientific evidence, certain oral contraceptives approved for daily use are "safe and effective" as emergency contraceptive pills.

"Although emergency contraception is not as effective as proper use of a regular contraceptive method, it substantially reduces the chances of becoming pregnant after unprotected sexual intercourse," the FDA said.

The agency released a prescription guide describing four regimens for using pills designed to prevent pregnancy as "morning after" pills. It calls for doses of two-to-four contraceptive pills up to 72 hours after intercourse, followed by the same dose 12 hours later.

The method is 75 percent effective in blocking a pregnancy. The pills work by blocking a fertilized egg from entering the uterus and won't work after the embryo is attached to the uterus. The main side effects are nausea and vomiting.

While doctors have long known that oral contraceptives could be administered in high doses to block pregnancies, few had access to specific information about manufacturers and dosage.

"The best-kept contraceptive secret is no longer a secret," said FDA Commissioner David Kessler. "Women should have the information this regimen is available. That's what we are about."

Advocates of the so-called "emergency contraception," which has been used for years in Europe, say it is useful for women who have been raped, whose birth control has failed or who acted in the heat of passion. It could prevent up to 2.3 million unintended pregnancies each year, one million of which now end in abortion, the FDA said.

Some opponents, however, view it as a form of abortion. "We consider life to begin from the very first moments," said Serrin Foster, president of Feminists for Life in America.

In a highly unusual move, the FDA issued its report independently and not at the request of drug manufacturers. The agency said it would encourage pharmaceutical companies to include dosage information on their labels but would not require them to do so.

A spokeswoman for one of two U.S. manufacturers of the pills said her company would not provide the information because of fear of lawsuits.

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Welfare reforms make hunger key issue for religious groups

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Protesting cutbacks for food stamps and other federal welfare programs, eight anti-hunger groups have joined to voice concern that charities cannot replace government programs for the poor.

Eight major hunger-relief organizations -- religious and secular -- have joined forces in an anti-hunger campaign called "Hunger Has a Cure."

The groups recently announced the launching of the campaign to increase public awareness and encourage grassroots initiatives to "reverse recent policy setbacks and move us toward the end of domestic hunger."

"Hunger is crippling our nation's future," said Christine Vladimiroff, president and chief executive officer of Second Harvest. Hunger "is 100 percent curable," she said at a news conference, but charities are not equipped to replace the government's nutritional safety net.

The campaign marks the first time the groups have come together under a common theme. Participants include Bread for the World; Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy; Food Chain; Food Research Action Center; RESULTS; Second Harvest; Share Our Strength and World Hunger Year.

The groups noted in fact sheets that nearly 30 million Americans don't have enough to eat. Of those, they said, 45 percent, or 13.6 million, are children. About 1.1 million children and 2.6 million people overall will fall into poverty as a result of the new welfare law, according to fact sheets.

"We are the last line of defense against hunger," Vladimiroff told reporters. "America's food banks and emergency food providers were not created to provide sustained hunger relief. It is the responsibility of the federal and state governments to cure chronic hunger."

A policy statement described the campaign's priorities as:

- To work together and with other organizations to improve the food stamps and child nutrition programs, especially in light of provisions in the recently passed welfare law.

- To work with other organizations to promote policies and avenues that truly help families achieve greater economic security.

- To support the work of charitable organizations that serve the poor.

- To strengthen the knowledge and capacity of local organizations engaged in state policy and advocacy efforts in the areas of hunger and poverty.

The Hunger Has a Cure campaign will launch television, radio and newspaper advertisements directed at increasing public awareness of hunger.

One newspaper ad with a picture of a soccer ball reads, "'Loser' is a harsh label for someone who isn't getting enough to eat."

A television ad shows a white child representing the 13 million children in the United States who suffer from the "disease" of hunger that is "making him tired, stunting his growth and breaking down his immune system."

Vladimiroff said a white child was used intentionally to dispel the myth that hunger is exclusively concentrated in the city and with people who are not working. She said 60 percent of children living in poverty are from a family with one working parent and most of them are white.

Another major initiative will be pushing for changes in legislation concerning care for the poor.

David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, said his organization will work for legislation that will help cure hunger. The group will mobilize churches across the country to fight for local legislation. He called on more government funding for the Food Stamp Program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children and other nutrition programs.

He criticized the welfare reforms and reiterated that churches cannot take up the slack.

"None of us believes for a moment that churches and charities will be able to fill the gap that's created by bad public policy," Beckmann said. Bread for the World states that "if we relied on the 350,000 U.S. churches to make up for the cuts, the average church would need to add \$150,000 to its budget over the next six years."

The 1996 welfare reform legislation limits food-stamp benefits for "able-bodied" citizens between the ages of 18 and 50 with no dependent children to three months during a 36-month period. Many legal immigrants will no longer be eligible for food stamps under the new legislation, according to the Food Research and Action Center.

In a separate but related campaign, World Vision, a Christian relief and development agency, recently sponsored a 30-hour fast led by more than 500,000 teenagers across the country. The relief agency said its purpose is to help teens become more committed to making a difference in their world.

"They are our next policy makers, politicians, ambassadors and teachers," said World Vision President Robert Seiple. "We must help them to understand today's worldwide social problems in order to instill a commitment to solving global issues in the future," he added.

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-- Tiffany Starr Smith, a Baptist News Service intern, contributed to this story.

Consultant offers tips for 'marketing' church

By Marv Knox

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Effective marketing strategies for churches "get the right message to the right person at the right time," public relations specialist John Manlove told a group of Baptist ministers and lay leaders.

Church "marketing" is the task of getting the church's message to unchurched people in the community, explained Manlove, president of Manlove Advertising and Public Relations in Pasadena, Texas. The firm develops marketing strategies primarily for large corporations but has also worked with scores of congregations, he said.

The right message makes the prospective church member want to visit the church, Manlove said. He compared that strategy to advertising that brings shoppers into a store rather than door-to-door sales.

People who come into a store are much more likely to buy a product than someone who is interrupted at home by a traveling salesperson, he said. Similarly, people who will visit a church are much better prospects than people interrupted at home by door-to-door visitation.

The "right message" needs to have several elements, Manlove insisted.

First, it must be personal, he said. The message should use words such as "you" and "me," he added, urging participants to write outreach materials as if they were one-on-one dialogue with the prospect.

The right message also needs to be emotional. "Passion drives people," he said. He urged churches to use brief testimonials of people whose lives have been changed by church ministries.

That message must be relevant, he stressed. "Think about who you're trying to reach and what matters to them," he said.

For example, a church trying to attract baby boomers could promote the strength of its programs for children and youth, an issue important to parents in the target group.

And the message must be unique, Manlove said. "Promote what's special about your church," he urged. That might be a significant ministry, a unique style of worship or even the church's location.

To reach the right person, churches must visualize the people they want to contact and think about how to appeal to them, he said.

A church trying to reach baby boomers and promoting its children's ministry might want to plan an event, such as a children's fair or celebration, that would attract families from throughout the community, he said. Then it should distribute information about the event throughout the geographical area, so the targeted people will be aware of it.

Manlove praised direct-mail as the best outreach medium for most churches. By carefully choosing where the pieces are to be mailed and planning a multiple-mailing strategy in advance, a church with even limited funds can maximize the number of strong, repetitive messages it sends to its prospects, he said.

On the contrary, television and radio ads are so expensive only the largest churches can afford to use them effectively, Manlove said.

Billboards can be fairly effective at frequently placing a message before a targeted audience, he said.

But door-to-door contact is very time-consuming and difficult, he added. Telephoning is better, but timing of calls can be a problem, he added.

And "timing is everything," he said of church marketing.

Marketing messages must be sent and received repeatedly, he noted, stressing, "Once is not enough."

That's why a church that markets its message must commit itself to the strategy over a period of time, Manlove declared. "I don't think there can be too much repetition of your message. ... We've got the greatest product in the world. We need to market it in a way that will be understandable and appealing to people."

Manlove presented his marketing workshop to participants in the innovative church track of the 1997 Texas Baptist Evangelism Conference this winter.

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Recent seminary graduate says 'hello' to Japan

By Bryan McAnally

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- "Konichiwa," the Japanese word for "hello," was Mark Busby's standard greeting as a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

It's a word he'll be using a lot more as the last Southern Baptist missionary to be assigned to Japan before a freeze on appointments to the nation takes effect.

Last May the Foreign Mission Board decided to cut its Japanese missions force by attrition from 179 to 120 and reallocate funds to areas more responsive to conversion efforts and where there is minimal access to the gospel.

According to a spokeswoman at the Richmond, Va.,-based Foreign Mission Board, no more new missionaries are anticipated in Japan until the missionary force is reduced to 60 units. Board officials estimate it will take about three years to reach that level by attrition. No current missionaries will lose their jobs, the official said.

Busby, a December seminary graduate, said he applied just days prior to the decision to send no more missionaries to Japan. That decision, he added, was one more confirmation of his calling to minister to the Japanese.

While a student at Samford University in Alabama in 1991, Busby volunteered as a summer missionary to the Philippines. On returning, he began teaching conversational English to Chinese students.

He approached the Foreign Mission Board about working with the Chinese but was asked to consider Japan instead, he said.

Two weeks after he graduated from college, Busby went to Nagasaki, Japan, for a 2-year assignment in the Foreign Mission Board's journeyman program.

"My time there was so affirming," Busby said. "I lived away from the missionaries, so I had to learn Japanese to survive. It didn't take long before I developed a love for the Japanese culture. You name it -- their food, their movies -- I knew I was where God wanted me to be," he said.

Apathy is Japan's biggest barrier to the gospel, Busby said.

"Less than 1 percent of the population is Christian, but we have total freedom to share the gospel," he said.

And while many Japanese claim Buddhism as their faith, most don't believe in it in its truest forms, Busby noted. "The Eastern religions don't have nearly the stronghold that people think. The primary false gods most people worship in Japan are materialism and secularism. Japan's economy is very strong and most people are doing well enough that they don't see what a relationship with Jesus Christ has to offer."

Busby said it is important to express Christian teachings in the "heart language" of the people. "I can say 'repent,' and they'll nod their heads but it won't affect them. But when I say 'kuiaratamenasai', the same concept in their own heart language, the demand for repentance hits them at home and all of a sudden they are face to face with Jesus Christ," he said.

Following his journeyman stint, Busby said he felt God leading him to attend Southwestern. "I knew the seminary was the next logical step for me to take to be obedient to God. Southwestern's reputation for missionary training convinced me that it is where I needed to go to be best equipped for the task for which I was called," Busby said.

His first minutes in the Southwestern men's dorm confirmed that decision.

"The second person I met in Fort Worth was Jean Irvine, a Japanese cleaning lady here at the seminary. I asked her where in town was the nearest Japanese church, expecting her to tell me it was clear across the metroplex. Instead, she pointed out the window to the Gambrell Street Japanese mission church."

The Geraldine, Ala., native immediately assimilated into the Dallas-Fort Worth Japanese community. "I never expected it," Busby remarked. "God really provided for me. He put me where I could be immersed in the Japanese culture and he prepared Japanese people to be here who could surround me."

Once a month, Busby and roommate Akira Niwa led a student meeting to evangelize and fellowship with Japanese attending Texas Christian and Dallas Baptist universities. The gatherings grew from 10 to more than 50 students.

"It's a very exciting time at the meetings -- half of the students who come aren't Christians." They come for the community and for the Japanese food, but end up hearing the gospel, he added.

"We had music, worship, testimony and praise at the meetings. The last few weeks I was there, we had two students from Texas Christian University accept Christ. What is so great is that they were led to the Lord by two other Japanese students who themselves haven't been Christians for too long. It's reached a point where the students are discipling one another."

Each summer during his seminary career, Busby returned to Japan as a church planter apprentice. In Yokohama in 1995, Busby felt God was leading him to graduate a semester early, December 1996.

"I wanted to obey, but I called on God to cover the costs," he said. "During Christmas break, a church I worked with in Kobe -- a city badly damaged by an earthquake a few years ago -- called me. They said they felt led to pay for the seminary training of a student returning to Japan. They covered everything. Since then, I've worked to be faithful to finish."

"God's call, no matter what the detail, always has a purpose," Busby said. "It feels good to be where I'm supposed to be. This is where I belong -- the Japanese are my people now, and I am one of them."