



Nashville, Tennessee  
**Associated  
Baptist Press**

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August 29, 2000

(00-76)

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**Directors of missions caught  
in middle of Baptist dispute**

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- Caught in the middle of what appears to be a growing rift between the moderate Baptist General Convention of Texas and the conservative Southern Baptist Convention are the state's 113 area associations, which typically have churches on both sides of the fray.

In an apparent effort to shore up support at the grass-roots level, SBC leaders have scheduled an unprecedented meeting with all Texas directors of missions without involving the state Baptist convention.

Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville, Tenn., mass-mailed a letter inviting directors of missions inviting to meet with him and other SBC agency heads at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth Sept. 21.

Other SBC entities to be represented at the meeting include the Annuity Board, Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, International Mission Board, North American Mission Board, LifeWay Christian Resources and all six SBC seminaries.

Chapman's letter said the purpose of the meeting is "to enhance communication and cooperation among all Southern Baptists."

He acknowledged that such a meeting is "unprecedented."

The Baptist General Convention of Texas staff member responsible for relating to associations agreed with Chapman at that point. "To my knowledge, this is the first time this has ever happened," said Lynn Eckerberger, associate director of the BGCT's State Missions Commission.

BGCT officials were neither informed of the meeting nor invited to attend.

With the creation of an alternative state Baptist convention in Texas in 1998, the way various Baptist entities relate to one another is evolving. These changes converge in associations, as directors of missions increasingly find themselves under pressure to take one side or the other.

"It's as if the entire convention has finally awakened to the key role of the director of missions," Eckeberger explained.

In years past, Texas Baptist associations related to only one state convention and one national convention, because that's all there were. Even though the associations, state convention and national convention all were autonomous bodies, most contact and mission planning between the national convention and associations passed through the state conventions.

Even today, most SBC funding for mission work in local associations is done cooperatively with state Baptist conventions.

About 400 of the BGCT's 6,000 churches have affiliated in some way with Southern Baptists of Texas. Of those 400, about 60 percent are uniquely aligned with the new state convention, said Executive Director Jim Richards.

But even among those that have left the BGCT entirely, the "vast majority" continue to participate with their association, he reported. To date, only four new associations have been created in all of Texas to relate directly to the new state convention.

Just five days after the SBC meeting at Southwestern, Texas directors of missions are invited to a meeting with Southern Baptists of Texas Convention leadership. Richards has invited all directors of missions to "explore ways we might be able to do missions and ministries together," he said.

"We want to facilitate churches that wish to affiliate with Southern Baptists of Texas Convention within that association," Richards said. Richards said he expects about two-thirds of Texas Baptist associations to be represented at the meeting.

The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention's meeting has been scheduled in Dallas just one day after an annual meeting for directors of missions sponsored by the BGCT. As in previous years, the BGCT will pay all expenses for directors of missions to travel to Dallas for its meeting.

The BGCT's Eckeberger found it ironic that directors of missions, if they choose to do so, could piggyback their attendance at the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention meeting on the BGCT-funded meeting.

Amid these conflicting tugs for attention, many directors of missions report they are trying to hold their associations together with appeals for unity in diversity.

"We're trying to say, 'Let's let each church make its own decision,'" explained Warren Hart, director of missions for Red River Valley Baptist Association near Paris. "We're trying to say as an association that we're open to working with whoever wants to work with us."

"What we're trying to model is that we're going to have churches that disagree with one another, but we're not going to be disagreeable," said Hart, whose association includes both churches uniquely aligned with Southern Baptists of Texas and uniquely aligned with the BGCT.

Some associations have virtually posted signs at the front door declaring politics off-limits.

"We've taken a pretty strong stand that if you have a political agenda, please don't bring it to the associational platform," said Lewis Lee, a veteran director of missions who leads San Antonio Baptist Association.

"Directors of missions want to be completely Baptist and want to affirm the autonomy of the Baptist association as it relates to any Baptist entity," Lee said. "They don't want to be co-opted by anybody. They want to do their task and be left alone to do their task."

Within the last year, a number of Texas Baptist associations have changed their bylaws either to remove references to required affiliations with state and national bodies or to broaden the scope of possible relations.

Money also adds a complicating factor in some associations. Although many Texas associations are completely self-supporting, others receive varying amounts of direct support from the BGCT.

Montie Martin, director of missions for Golden Triangle Association, has invited BGCT Executive Director Charles Wade to address his association's annual meeting this fall. Some pastors in the association

are unhappy about the stance the BGCT has taken to differentiate itself from the SBC. These pastors will not be pleased to hear Wade speak, Martin acknowledged.

"I've said, 'Look, if we're going to continue to work with people, we're going to have to keep the lines of communication open,'" Martin explained. "And right now, the BGCT is pumping about \$50,000 a year into our association. ... If somebody is writing us checks every year and some want me to tell the man behind that he's not welcome to come down here and speak..., I'm not going to do that."

Another likely area of testing on matters of relationship could come this fall as associations consider whether to embrace the 2000 version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" or retain allegiance to an earlier version of the doctrinal statement.

Historically, associations have been the arbiters of doctrinal disputes between Baptist churches, while state and national conventions based good standing on financial support.

In this context, some pastors and churches strongly loyal to the SBC have signaled a desire for their associations to tighten membership guidelines to require affirmation of the new "Baptist Faith and Message." Other pastors and churches disaffected by the SBC's more conservative direction naturally oppose any such attempt.

In some cases, those debates could be costly.

For example, a pastor of one larger Texas church (who asked not to be identified to avoid creating more tension in his association) explained his dilemma. If a motion to require affirmation of the updated "Baptist Faith and Message" comes to the floor of his association's annual meeting this fall, a majority of churches likely would support the change. But that very change would exclude his church and thereby cost the association its largest source of funding.

Many Texas associations are seeking a neutral way out of this dilemma by not aligning themselves with just one version of the "Baptist Faith and Message."

Among a small sampling of directors of missions polled, a majority said their associations either already have acted or likely will act this fall to embrace all versions of the "Baptist Faith and Message" -- 1925, 1963, 1998 and 2000.

"We feel like any church that will accept the 'Baptist Faith and Message' in any of its versions will be a Baptist church," said Lee of San Antonio Association.

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## **Texas Baptist study team visiting SBC seminaries**

By Tim Palmer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- The possibility that a Southern Baptist seminary in Missouri may lose more than \$400,000 in Texas Baptist funding loomed a step closer Aug. 22 as a Baptist General Convention of Texas study team visited the campus of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Last year, Texas Baptists contributed \$411,000 to the Kansas City seminary, one of six owned by the Southern Baptist Convention, through the Cooperative Program unified budget that supports both state and national efforts.

Changes in that arrangement could be forthcoming, however, depending on findings and recommendations of a committee formed last fall "to examine the financial resources, theological positions, and philosophies of Southern Baptist and BGCT-supported seminaries." Six of the study committee's 14

members visited Midwestern. Along with the six SBC seminaries, visits were also scheduled to the BGCT-supported George W. Truett Seminary in Waco, Texas, and Logsdon School of Theology in Abilene, Texas.

Texas Baptists, the largest state affiliate of the 15.8 million-member SBC, gave a total of about \$5 million to Southern Baptist seminaries last year. In light of recent disagreements between moderate leaders of the BGCT and the conservative-led SBC, some Texas Baptists have suggested some of that money might be better spent if it were reallocated in ways that more directly benefit the state's Baptists.

In early 1999, then-BGCT president Russell Dilday identified Midwestern -- along with Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. -- as potential targets for funding cuts. Dilday, a former Southwestern Seminary president who was fired by conservative trustees, said at the time that many Texas Baptists objected to Calvinism being promoted by some seminary leaders.

In addition to Midwestern, subcommittee members have so far visited Southern and Southeastern seminaries. The final SBC seminary visits were scheduled Aug. 29 at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Aug. 30 at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Representing Midwestern Seminary in the Aug. 22 meeting were interim president Michael Whitehead and three other administrators, along with some seminary trustees. The trustee executive board met Aug. 21-22, and some members stayed to meet with the Texas group.

Whitehead declined to comment on the Aug. 22 meeting, saying through a spokeswoman that the Council of Seminary Presidents would issue a joint statement after the final SBC site visit by the Texas committee

Abilene pastor Michael Chancellor, vice chairman of the Texas study committee, also declined to answer questions about the visit to Midwestern. "We have agreed ahead of time that we would have no comment on our work," he said.

Chancellor said committee chairman Robert Campbell, a pastor from Houston, would speak for the committee when its report is finished.

The meeting at Midwestern was planned on short notice. Originally, the BGCT committee had wanted representatives from SBC seminaries to travel to Dallas and meet there. This was communicated to Whitehead in a June 22 letter from study-committee chairman Campbell, along with a request that Whitehead complete a detailed questionnaire.

Each of the other SBC seminary presidents apparently received a similar letter. Speaking as the Council of Seminary Presidents, they suggested that the committee visit the seminary campuses instead. This was communicated to Campbell in a July 26 letter from Golden Gate Seminary president William Crews, chairman of the presidents' council.

In a follow-up letter to Campbell on July 28, Crews told of meeting with BGCT executive director Charles Wade the previous week in Nashville, Tenn. "In the course of our conversation, it became clear that the 'Baptist Faith and Message' as adopted this June by the Southern Baptist Convention is a major focus of your consideration," Crews wrote.

Crews said in the letter that he had been told a primary purpose for the meetings with the seminaries was to determine whether endorsement of the revised faith statement would be made a criterion for employment at an SBC seminary.

"All six of the seminaries stand together in affirming that we will indeed make the 'Baptist Faith and Message' an issue of non-negotiable accountability for all who teach in our institutions," Crews wrote to Campbell. He noted that to do so would continue "a long-standing policy that was in place before any of the current presidents were elected to our positions of responsibility."

At its 1999 annual meeting, the 2.7 million-member BGCT rejected the 1998 version of the 'Baptist Faith and Message' with its controversial amendment on the family in favor of the 1963 version. Wade was among the messengers who spoke against further revisions to the statement during the SBC annual meeting in June in Orlando, Fla.

The study committee next reports its findings to the Texas Baptist executive board. The state convention could take action on any funding recommendations from the group during the BGCT annual meeting, scheduled Oct. 30-31 in Corpus Christi.

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## **Volunteer missionaries question IMB church-planting focus**

By Tony Cartledge

RALEIGH, N.C. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention International Mission Board is enjoying record participation from volunteers engaged in short-term projects, but some volunteers are confused by a new strategy that discourages the construction of mission churches.

By the Richmond, Va., -based IMB's count, 26,741 volunteers were involved in overseas ministry during the past church year, more than double the number of six years ago. This year, the number is expected to top 30,000.

The surge in volunteers comes, however, at a time when the IMB is implementing a new field strategy that will steer short-term teams away from church construction projects, a favored activity among many volunteers. The new focus, according to the IMB's annual report for 2000, is the development of "church-planting movements."

"The board's main objective is presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to lead individuals to saving faith in him and bring about church-planting movements among all the peoples of the world," according to the report entitled "The Unfinished Task 2000: Dispelling the Darkness."

"Church-planting movement" is used as a technical term to describe "a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches within a people group, city or country."

IMB strategy divides the world's population (outside of the United States and Canada) into 14 regions, each guided by a regional leadership team that is responsible for developing strategies designed to spark church-planting movements among all people groups of their region. Smaller mission teams, each assigned to a particular people group or segment of the population, are expected to "do whatever it takes to begin and nurture a church-planting movement among the people," according to the report.

The Church Planting Movements booklet published by the IMB explains basic elements of the church-planting movement strategy in which missionaries train indigenous converts to begin new cell or house churches that are expected to reproduce rapidly, hopefully leading to exponential church growth.

The local strategy is described by the acronym POUCH. It encourages missionaries to promote "participative" Bible study/worship groups which use "obedience" to biblical teachings as the only measure of success, are led by multiple "unpaid" church leaders, and exist as small "cell" or "house" churches that rarely exceed 15 members before beginning a new group.

In essence, the strategy calls for missionaries to quickly make themselves obsolete by training local people to plant the first generation of churches, assisting them with a second-generation start, observing third-generation development, and then leaving the movement to grow on its own.

Some critics of the new strategy argue that the rapid development of churches with little supervision leaves the movement vulnerable to heresy. The IMB publication counters that new churches are to be firmly grounded "on the word of God and in the priesthood of all believers." Since each cell group is to be based on a commitment to obey the Bible, which is studied in participative fashion, mission strategists expect the group

itself to provide "a natural corrective" to extremes of interpretation.

The strategy expects indigenous churches to be self-motivated, self-sustaining and self-replicating. IMB leaders say too much outside assistance leads to a "welfare mentality" that could bog down church-planting movements.

As a result, IMB strategists have begun discouraging American volunteers from constructing buildings for mission churches, hoping instead to involve them in other activities that support the church-planting movement strategy.

In May, for example, IMB strategist Phil Templin led the Middle America regional leadership team to discuss how to involve large numbers of volunteers "without stifling local-church initiative and creating a welfare mentality." In a follow-up letter to IMB staff in Middle America, Templin called on missionaries to move away from constructing church buildings by the end of 2000.

As word of Templin's letter spread, some veteran volunteers reacted with surprise and dismay.

Wally Knight of Bethel Baptist Church in Canton, N.C., who has participated in 40 volunteer mission trips, expressed his frustration in e-mail messages to IMB President Jerry Rankin and other agency leaders. He also circulated a critique of the new strategy that accused IMB leaders of not being straightforward with volunteers.

Quoting from the IMB's Church Planting Movements, Knight noted that the construction of church buildings is described as "well-intentioned obstacles" and "stumbling blocks."

Knight wrote, "Thousands of past construction volunteers and their supporters who paid their expenses and bought the building materials will ask: 'We were obstacles? We built stumbling blocks?'"

Knight, who is retired from the military and the federal Civil Service, recalled an experience in Nicaragua when a local woman expressed thanks for the team's construction efforts as an answer to her prayers.

"I cannot bring myself to believe that God sent us there to construct an obstacle to his own works of salvation," he said.

Jerry Sims, another well-traveled volunteer from Bethel Baptist Church, also wrote to Rankin. He cited personal experience with church-construction projects in Honduras, Brazil and Romania that he said have been used of God as a powerful witness. In Romania, he said, local people would not attend a house church, believing that church buildings were necessary for worship.

In an IMB-generated article written by Mark Kelly and released July 31 by Baptist Press, Rankin praised volunteers for accelerating evangelism around the world and for promoting increased financial giving and prayers for missions. He cautioned, however, that "missions efforts sometimes can harm as well as help, no matter how good the intentions."

"Over many years, missionaries have recognized it is a mistake to try to accelerate growth by an infusion of financial aid to build churches and support pastors," Rankin said. "Well-intended financial assistance too often creates dependence and handicaps the initiative and faith essential for spontaneous growth."

Rankin said there had been phenomenal church growth in many parts of the world, but not in places dependent on Americans to provide their church buildings and support their pastors.

There is an inevitable tension, said Rankin, between what volunteers want to do and what is most effective in the long-range strategy of missionaries in the field.

"Our field leadership in responsive places, such as Middle America, struggles with the tension between utilizing a massive number of volunteers and channeling their efforts into beneficial strategies," he said.

Templin stressed that all IMB requests for volunteers are generated by local missionaries who suggest ways that volunteers can make the most effective, strategic contribution possible. Like Rankin, he emphasized that the need for volunteers is expected to increase, not decrease.

Though mission leaders have said little publicly about alternate projects for volunteers, the Church Planting Movements booklet suggests a variety of ways for volunteers to support a church-planting movement

strategy. These include prayer-walks, evangelism, literature distribution, pastoral mentoring and human-needs ministries, as well as moral support and passion that energizes career missionaries and indigenous believers.

Templin pointed to the success of human-needs ministries in Honduras, many involving construction projects. Southern Baptist volunteers have helped to build 600 houses for families who lost their homes to Hurricane Mitch in October 1998, he said, adding that those efforts played a key role in seeing 78 new churches started. At least 3,000 new homes are still needed, he said.

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## **Christians in Hollywood meet to discuss entertainment ethics**

By Marshall Allen

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. (ABP) -- Hollywood is often criticized in religious circles as lacking moral scruples. Yet there's a contingent in the entertainment industry that takes right and wrong seriously.

Nearly 200 people involved in the entertainment industry -- many of them committed Christians -- gathered Aug. 12 in Beverly Hills, Calif., for a first-time conference titled "Content and Conscience: Toward Ethics of Screenwriting."

Mostly writers attended the conference at the Writers Guild Theater, but a smattering of producers, directors and actors also appeared. They came to wrestle with complexities of producing honest and compelling entertainment that affirms Judeo-Christian values in the secular media.

"The Columbine incident was a watershed moment for this industry," said conference coordinator Jimmy Duke. "It made writers and producers stop and wonder if they have something to do with this situation."

Conference moderator Miguel Valenti, author of the book "More Than a Movie: Ethics in Entertainment," noted that while almost every professional field has a code of ethics, Hollywood is completely lacking any such standard. Considering the fact that the media is arguably the most socializing force in society, Valenti said it's apparent that ethics must be addressed.

The conference was sponsored by Inter-Mission, a nonprofit organization of more than 3,200 entertainment professionals in Hollywood and New York City. Inter-Mission is based in the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood and exists to encourage Christians to pursue excellence in television, film and theater.

"The goal of this conference was to start the dialogue," Duke explained. "It's very important for us as Christians to be a part of the solutions in Hollywood, not the problems. So often the Christian church wants to stand outside and criticize but not do anything about it. We don't engage pop culture."

One of the tenets of Inter-Mission is to establish and strengthen a Christian presence within the industry in order to slowly influence Hollywood from the inside. Through its "Act One" program, Christian writers are trained in the art of screenwriting.

"We believe that in order to effect change we have to be on the inside of the industry, so first we strive for excellence," said Duke. "Nothing preaches the gospel more than excellence."

Duke said the conference on ethics came out of previous training seminars held for Act One students. Students said they needed more than just tools to hone their craft; they had to talk about the ethics of writing screenplays.

The collection of Hollywood hopefuls and insiders who attended Content and Conscience dealt with the paradoxes of being a Christian in the entertainment industry: Is it possible for Christians to produce screenplays that include the realities of sin? If so, how? And, assuming that a Christian can write such a script,

is it possible to produce a moral story when much of Hollywood seems to revel in debauchery?

"I'm trying to understand how to make my Christian faith real in the writing that I do," said Steve Storm, a 29-year-old screenwriter. "I'm trying to figure out how to address violence and personal sexuality and things that involve the sin nature, and at the same time encourage people. If we're going to be truthful, we have to talk about sin. But at the same time there are certain ways of talking about truth that are damaging and other ways that are edifying and healing. I want to be sure that I'm not doing damage to the viewing public."

One featured speaker at the conference was David Gushee, a professor of moral philosophy at Baptist-affiliated Union University in Jackson, Tenn. Gushee said one test for any professional to assess her success is to consider the social impact of her work.

Screenwriters are in the unique position of being the creators of projects that can have worldwide impact, Gushee said. He encouraged writers to make their work "soul refining," as opposed to "soul coarsening."

"Refining the soul is about maximizing what it means to be human as God intended," said Gushee. "It's really the opposite of coarsening" content, he said, which could be defined as brutish, violent, vulgar, lacking sensitivity and joy, and making little of human potential.

Soul refining "is an appreciation of the human condition," Gushee explained. "It has to do with depicting love in something of its depth. Depicting sorrow and grief in their depth. Portraying evil, death, moral goodness, moral blindness ... getting at the dimension of human behavior and human society."

A dilemma facing Christian writers is how to deal with sinful elements in a productive way. Three issues at the conference's forefront were the use of sex, violence and profanity in telling stories.

"I think that there is something so private about sex that probably the more explicitly you depict it the less likely it is to be soul refining," said Gushee.

On the other hand, "If you have a film that communicates that violence is evil, and it creates suffering, and it's evil, that can be soul refining," he said. "I think that 'Schindler's List' and 'Saving Private Ryan' did that."

Conference attendees agreed it was a positive experience to meet and discuss the challenges of ethical screenwriting. They left without easy answers, but they were encouraged to continue their struggle both as individual artists and as a community to create compelling stories that both entertain and edify.

"I work with children a lot, and I know that what goes on in movies is the complete opposite of what I'm teaching them," said Angel McElhaney, a young screenwriter and educator from Georgia. "I've wondered if it's possible to put on the screen an exciting, great, loving movie that kids could watch that I would be proud to say I wrote."

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-- Marshall Allen is a free-lance writer in Pasadena, Calif.

## **Ministry 'connects the dots' between haves and have-nots**

By Brenda Sanders

GENTRY, Mo. (ABP) -- It might be a mother in Missouri talking by e-mail on a donated computer with her daughter in South America. Or a single mother driving a donated car. Or missionaries around the world receiving donated dental equipment.

All are examples of what can happen through "Fish and Loaves" ministry. Established by Darrell Treat, bivocational pastor of Gentry Baptist Church in Gentry, Mo., Fish and Loaves is "used of God to

connect the dots," Treat said. It connects people who have quality items to give away with individuals who need those items but can't afford to purchase them.

Treat and his wife, Deb, began Fish and Loaves about seven years ago when both were students at Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, Mo. When the couple became aware of several other student families in financial need, they gave away food from their own cupboards, then mentioned the need to others on campus.

Terri Milligan, who at that time was on staff at Midwestern Seminary, told her church about the situation. For several months, Mosby (Mo.) Baptist Church members donated food that Milligan took to Treat. Then Treat shared the food with students.

"It's amazing what people will give when they know someone's in need," Milligan said. "Our congregation was willing to give, and Darrell knew who needed help the most."

In the years that followed, Fish and Loaves expanded into a ministry that provides thousands of dollars worth of items to churches and individuals across the United States and in several foreign countries.

Jane Jackson, a member of Midway Baptist Church in Easton, Mo., said she contacted Treat when her son, Brad, expressed a desire to begin a Bible study in his fraternity house at the University of Missouri. "Darrell provided us with Bibles and Bible-study materials, as well as a couple of computers. It really gave Brad a good start."

Most recently, Treat received a gift of several boxes of medical supplies, which he then donated to Mercy and Truth Medical Missions of Shawnee, Kan. The Christian organization will use the items to provide medical care on an upcoming mission trip to a Third World nation.

"Through God's abundance and with the help of hundreds of volunteers, we've located free, or at well below retail cost, usable items to give to individuals and churches in need," Treat said.

Many churches continue to provide food to the Fish and Loaves ministry. In addition, Treat has secured items such as computers and desktop printers, public-address systems, microphones and stands, guitars and pianos, hundreds of Bibles and hymnals, folding chairs, sound-proof panels, boxes of children's coats, medical supplies, automobiles and thousands of canned goods.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Congregations or individuals who would like to become involved with Fish and Loaves can contact Treat. Both those who have items to donate to this ministry and people or churches needing assistance are encouraged to contact Treat via e-mail at [fishandloaves@juno.com](mailto:fishandloaves@juno.com), or through Gentry Baptist Church, P.O. Box 160, Gentry, Mo., 64453-0160

## **Sports-related ministry focus of Baptist church**

By Shawn Hendricks

LEBANON, Mo. (ABP) -- A portion of the bus barn behind Hillcrest Baptist Church in Lebanon, Mo., is set aside for sports equipment -- baseball gloves, bats, balls, helmets.

This equipment isn't for any local church league team. It's set aside for a higher cause.

For the past few years, members of the church have participated in a variety of sports-related ministries, such as sending sports equipment to missionaries in other nations and distributing Bibles to high school athletes.

Recently, church members took part in distributing 1,000 water bottles at the Babe Ruth World Series in Lebanon, Mo. Each bottle had the plan of salvation printed on it.

"[These ministries] have gotten the church excited about witnessing," said Joe Jones, minister of youth for the church.

Church members Paul Dudley and Teresa Moots are two of the congregation's all-stars in ministry.

Dudley coaches baseball at Lebanon High School. He started collecting sports equipment for missions about two years ago when he wanted to get rid of some older baseball gear that had been piling up at the school.

"Within the first week of posting it on the Internet, I had more requests than I had equipment," he said.

Before long, the ministry expanded into a much larger operation, providing all types of sports equipment worldwide.

With the help of family, friends and fellow church members, Dudley has sent equipment to the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Mexico, Uruguay and Brazil.

"We've sent equipment to about every continent," he said.

A lot of the donations come from area high school coaches and church members. "Instead of throwing it away, they send it to me," Dudley said. "One guy sent in a complete set of basketball uniforms."

Dudley hopes to keep the project going. "I've always felt like this is something I can do," he said. "God has worked it out."

Moots, who is now a freshman at Southwest Missouri State University, is another church member who helped start a sports-related ministry. Its focus is to distribute Bibles to varsity athletes at her high school and to opposing teams.

"God really spoke to me about this area," she said. "I thought about how much of an emphasis there is on high-school sports, and maybe if people could see good sportsmanship in these athletes then maybe [the spectators] would wonder why and want to find out."

Moots knows that change like that doesn't happen overnight. "Maybe they won't read it at first, but maybe in the future they will, and maybe it will touch their lives."

The church youth group helped distribute sports Bibles during cookouts and other events held at the church for various athletic teams and their opponents.

Car washes and other fund-raising events helped raise money for the 250 Bibles that were distributed last school year. Athletes on the volleyball, football, track, softball, golf, tennis, cross-country, basketball and baseball teams were given the opportunity to pick up a Bible.

Seeing fellow student athletes accept the Bibles was a blessing to Moots.

"When I would go to another church and see different youth and people with these Bibles and actually using that tool, it was really neat," she said.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Photo available to Baptist editors from Word & Way.

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