Associated Baptist Press

Editor: **Bob Allen**
Executive editor: **Greg Warner**

Phone: **800.340.6626**
Fax: **904.262.7745**
E-mail: **bob@abpnews.com**

February 27, 2001 **(01-17)**

IN THIS ISSUE:

CBF to vote on new guidelines for membership, governance

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in June will decide whether to adopt more specific membership requirements and create a new governing board.

Proposed changes to the CBF's constitution and bylaws would require churches and individuals seeking membership to "embrace" the mission and core values of the Fellowship, not just send money.

The revised constitution also would change the CBF's top decision-making body from a "representative" group to a "governing" board, said CBF executive Daniel Vestal.

Leaders said the changes reflect the Fellowship's coming of age. The moderate Baptist group will celebrate its 10th anniversary during its June 28-30 General Assembly in Atlanta, where the changes will be considered.

Last year the Fellowship adopted a new mission statement that focuses on serving local churches. The constitution and bylaw changes, which represent a second phase of strategic planning, were approved Feb. 24 by the Coordinating Council, the representative group that currently directs the organization.

The constitution and bylaw changes will require approval by two thirds of those voting at the General Assembly.

During its three-day meeting, the council also adopted an $18 million budget for 2001-02; elected Reba Cobb of Louisville, Ky., to its No. 2 staff position as chief operating officer; and heard that its new restriction on funding theological schools that accept gay students will be challenged at the council's June meeting.

Under current CBF bylaws, any church or individual that contributes to the Fellowship is considered a member. That includes churches that simply allow individual members to channel contributions to the Fellowship without any formal action by the church. That practice, critics say, artificially inflates the size of the CBF.

"There's no public identification ritual," Vestal explained. Churches are not asked to vote, sign a document or "walk an aisle," he said.

Asking churches to embrace the CBF's mission and values, Vestal said, runs the risk of alienating some churches and shrinking the number now considered CBF members (about 1,800). "It's going to create some tensions." But it also gives churches that want to identify with the Fellowship a clear way to do that, he added. "At some point, I'd like to say, 'Here are our partnering churches.'"

The new standard will offer "a sense of belonging" to many churches that already consider themselves a part of the Fellowship, said Fellowship moderator Donna Forrester of Greenville, S.C.

While the new standard will tighten membership in the Fellowship, leaders say it will not limit participation. Any church or individual, whether or not a member, can participate in CBF meetings and programs. But only members can vote on business matters.

The revised constitution creates a "Partnering Member Forum," to be held during the annual General Assembly, during which members only will handle business. Every member of a participating church is allowed to vote, as well as individuals who join the Fellowship on their own.

Neither do the revised bylaws dictate how a church "embraces" the mission and values. Although some church action is required, the church decides what action to take "in its own judgment and through its own process."

"'Embrace' means whatever the church says it means," explained moderator-elect Jim Baucom of Lynchburg, Va. "They will decide for themselves what it means to be a part of the Fellowship."

"It's going to be messy," conceded Baucom, a member of the task force that drafted the changes. "But every time we tried to clean this up, we infringed on the autonomy of the local church and we backed away from that."

"We would love for every church to adopt a statement to say they understand the core values of the Fellowship, ...but it's simply too much to ask," Baucom said.

By creating a more specific category of membership while not restricting participation, CBF is catering to churches that want various levels of affiliation with CBF, council members said.

"We are trying to find a place for the church that wants fuzziness and the church that wants clarity," said Gary Parker, CBF coordinator for Baptist life and leadership.

The revised membership bylaw actually requires five things of "partnering" churches and individuals: 1) embracing the CBF mission, 2) embrace the CBF core values, 3) pray for its leaders and ministries, 4) participate in its ministries and decisions, and 5) contribute financially.

The CBF's mission states: "We are a fellowship of Baptist Christians and churches who share a passion for the Great Commission of Jesus Christ and a commitment to Baptist principles of faith and practice. Our mission: serving Baptist Christians and churches as they discover and fulfill their God-given mission."

The CBF lists seven "commitments" as core values: basic Baptist principles, biblically based global missions, a resource model as the primary means of serving churches, a biblical vision of justice and mercy, lifelong learning for ministry, trustworthiness and effectiveness.

The "organizational value" adopted last year, which prohibits funding of groups that condone homosexuality, is a funding policy and not a core value, CBF leaders noted.

The 78-member Coordinating Council voted to replace itself with a 40-member Governing Board. The selection process for those board members drew the most heated debate of the three-day meeting.

Currently the CBF's 18 state and regional organizations elect members to the Coordinating Council, with each state/region assigned a certain number of positions.

Under the revised bylaws, the task of nominating members to the Governing Board will fall to a nominating committee. Half the members of the committee will be chosen by the board from names submitted by the state/regional groups. The other half will come from the Governing Board itself.

Critics say the new structure makes the Governing Board more like a self-perpetuating board and distances it from the grass roots of the Fellowship.

"I don't see how the [Fellowship] body can influence that process once this is set in motion," said Bob Setzer of Macon, Ga.

Supporters say the new structure will result in a more diverse board and one better suited for the task of overseeing the organization's staff, budget and ministries. They also say it is inappropriate to let one Baptist group (a state/regional body) elect the members of another autonomous organization.

"Why do we add a filter that is a separate, autonomous Baptist body?" said Beth Fogg of Richmond, Va., a member of the strategic task force.

An amendment to share power, letting state/regional groups name half the Governing Board and the board itself to pick the other half, failed on a 22-27 vote.

Supporters of the new structure say the intent is to create more grass-roots participation, not less.

"It will allow us to have a more diverse group," said Fogg. The council has had less diversity because of the involvement of state/regional groups, she said.

"The state and regional groups worked real hard to send us their diversity," moderator Forrester told ABP, "but when we got together, we weren't as diverse as we wanted to be."

Baucom said the board still will be representative of CBF's membership, just not in the same way. While representation on the board would no longer be based on geography, it could involve people not active in state/regional groups, he said.

"We are seeking to supplant geographical representation with direct representation, since our primary covenant is not with the states and regions -- as important as they are to our movement -- but with the local church," he told ABP. "As far as we are concerned, every CBF organization exists to serve local church and faithful Baptists within local churches."

The Governing Board would not be self-perpetuating, supporters add, because the nominees must be approved by the CBF members at the annual General Assembly.

While the Coordinating Council has been a way for CBF members to be involved on the national level, Baucom said, the new structure will seek to expand involvement in other ways, while allowing the more specialized Governing Board to focus on fiduciary issues.

For instance, Fellowship staffers now will be able to create ad hoc special-interest groups to represent the concerns of CBF members on such issues as education, Baptist principles and missions, supporters say, rather than funneling those concerns through the Coordinating Council.

Also a Leadership Team will be formed with representation from the state/regional groups and other organizations that affirm the CBF mission. While not involved in governance, this broad-based group will collaborate in accomplishing the CBF's strategic plan.

Additionally, every Partnering Individual, as well as every member of a Partnering Church, will be allowed to vote in the Forum.

A controversial policy adopted by the Coordinating Council last October again came up for debate during its recent meeting. The funding policy prohibits financial support "for organizations that condone, advocate or affirm homosexual practice." The action will affect CBF support of several theological schools that are required by their parent universities to accept gay students.

Dixie Petrey, a council member from Knoxville, Tenn., made a motion to rescind the policy. However, because prior notice is required to rescind a previous action, the vote on her motion was delayed until the council's meeting in June.

Vestal told the council the policy is "a middle-of-the-road solution" that allows CBF to support students at the affected schools through scholarship money while prohibiting direct support of the schools. "I am working real hard to deal with a conscience issue for many churches," he said.

The $18 million budget for 2001-02 is a 6 percent increase over the current year's budget. The largest portion goes to global missions -- $10,743,846, a 6 percent increase.

Administrative expenses rise 37 percent in the new budget to $2,237,960. The increase primarily will pay for two new professional positions, the resource center coordinator and a development coordinator yet to be hired.

The 11 theological schools funded by CBF will share $60,000 more in scholarship money, while two of the theology schools -- at Gardner-Webb University and Campbell University, both in North Carolina -- will share a $55,000 increase.

Most of the other organizational "partners" funded by the CBF will receive no increase in the new budget, however.

-30-

Scholar says 'charitable choice' could harm American religion

By Ken Camp

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- "Charitable choice" initiatives could in the long run be "devastating" to the voluntary nature of American religion, says a Baptist church-state scholar.

Many critics of proposals to allow government funding of faith-based social ministries say they violate the separation of church and state. But Derek Davis, director of the J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, warned recently that charitable choice could also undermine the vibrancy of voluntary religious practice.

"Over time, we are going to destroy the dynamic character of religion in America," Davis said at a recent conference. "The voluntary spirit is going to die."

Davis spoke on "Separation of Church and State: Making Sense of the American System" at the annual statewide conference of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission in Austin.

Davis said the United States doesn't have a "pure" separation of church and state but that an "institutional" separation "has been fundamental" to the nation's history.

Americans traditionally resist the use of government to advance sectarian religion or to "prop up" values not commonly shared by the general population, he said.

Despite that, Davis said, there has long been a tradition of integrating religion and politics.

Clergy are allowed to run for public office, politicians of all stripes use religious rhetoric, and more than 120 religious lobby groups have offices in Washington, D.C., he noted.

Similarly, there is a long-standing attitude of accommodation of civil religion, Davis said. From imprinting "In God We Trust" on currency to paying chaplains to serve the Congress, America has adopted a "generic" religious identity.

"Civil religion is the way we put a religious face on our nationhood in informal ways," he explained.

Davis said Americans historically have affirmed "commitment to the institutional separation of church and state, integration of religion and politics, and accommodation of civil religion."

Placing specific issues into one of the three categories helps account for some of the "incongruities, anomalies and inconsistencies" in the American approach toward church and state, he said.

-30-

Scholar says U.S. facing opportunity to resolve religion in schools debate

By Mark Wingfield

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- America today faces its best chance in history to establish a shared vision of harmony between faith and public education, a national expert in the field said recently.

"The real question is, 'Will we be able to implement the vision?'" said Charles Haynes, senior scholar for religious freedom at the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center.

Haynes spoke at the annual conference of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Christian Life Commission on finding common ground for religious liberty in public schools.

"Right now in the United States, we have as close to a shared vision on public education as we've ever had," Haynes said. He specifically cited the work of the First Amendment Center and other groups that have joined together to draft documents spelling out generally accepted understandings of what the Constitution allows by way of religious expression in schools.

Their work is showcased in a brief statement of principles titled "Religious Liberty, Public Education and the Future of American Democracy." The statement, which has been endorsed by diverse faith groups and civil-liberties groups, is available online at www.freedomforum.org.

Haynes outlined two "failed models" of the past, which he contrasted with the potential of the new model advocated by the First Amendment Center.

The first failed model is the "sacred public school," Haynes said. The model was employed in some communities in the early days of the nation, when there was a "semi-established Protestant nation."

But such an approach "broke apart as the nation became more diverse," he explained.

And this model never worked as well as some would like to think, Haynes asserted.

"Wouldn't it be great if we could go back to the good old days, when we all got along?" he asked. "There were no good old days. We had Bible wars in Cincinnati over whose version of the Bible was to be used in schools."

Unfortunately, he said, many people today believe the only way for faith to "get back in the conversation" is by returning to questionable practices of government-sponsored religious activities in schools. "It is sad that these 'to-whom-it-may-concern' prayers are seen as the last hope," he said.

A second failed model, Haynes said, is the "naked public school." In this model, those who fear religion attempt to keep the peace by removing all references to religion from public education.

"This easy way out is a misunderstanding of the First Amendment," he said.

And out of this failed model come the horror stories of elementary children not being allowed to draw pictures of churches or write papers that mention Jesus, he said.

A better way is to avoid both these extreme models and advocate a third way, "the civil public school," said Haynes, who has led hundreds of training sessions for public school districts.

This model offers three main features, he said.

First, it is built around sound policies on religious-liberty rights. It moves beyond secondary issues such as Christmas trees and menorahs to promote constitutionally allowed religious education.

Second, he said, it promotes fairness in curriculum. "It is not consistent to say kids can learn everything about most things but virtually nothing about religion. ... We fight over 60-second prayers in the morning and ignore what kids are learning. Yet that's where their worldview is shaped."

Third, it demands character education. Schools can and must accomplish this mission, he said. "No matter what (students) know, no matter how many computers they can operate, if they are lousy human beings, it doesn't matter."

-30-

Case study illustrates line in religion-in-schools debate

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- "Sally" is a public-school student who has been to a Catholic church camp over the summer. On her first day back at school, the teacher asks each student to tell the class something about what they did over the summer.

Sally stands before the class and says: "I went to church camp this summer, and I learned to pray the rosary. It totally changed my life, and now I feel so much closer to God."

Should the teacher allow Sally to give such a speech? Has Sally crossed the line into the forbidden territory of church-state separation?

No, she hasn't, and the teacher should allow her to talk, advised Oliver Thomas, special counsel to the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center.

Thomas set up the hypothetical situation during a presentation at the Baptist General Convention of Texas Christian Life Commission seminar Feb. 13.

Then he took the case study one step further. Suppose Sally concluded her speech by handing out rosary beads to all her public-school classmates and saying, "Now, I'm going to teach you to pray the rosary."

That should not be allowed, he advised, because Sally has crossed the line from telling about her own experiences -- while fulfilling the assignment set out by the teacher -- to calling on fellow students to participate in a religious activity.

-30-

By Mark Wingfield

Religious Right, secularists cited as twin threats to religious liberty

By Ken Camp

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- Radical religion and the radical Enlightenment were the primary forces to establish religious liberty in America, says historian Edwin Gaustad. Today, he said, a similarly unlikely pairing of the Religious Right and strong secularism pose its greatest threat.

Gaustad, professor emeritus of history at the University of California at Riverside, spoke on "Religious Liberty in the Drama of American History" at the statewide conference of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, Feb. 12-13 in Austin.

Neither the Protestant Reformation as a whole nor the colonization of America automatically resulted in religious liberty, he said.

It was first the "radical" religionists such as Baptists and Quakers and later "radical Enlightenment" proponents such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison who birthed religious freedom in the New World, Gaustad maintained.

The first influential radical, Roger Williams, was exiled from Massachusetts for holding "new and dangerous opinions." He established Rhode Island as the first secular state, dedicated "to civil things only."

Williams, who founded the first Baptist church in America, created a haven not only for Baptists and other Separatists, but also for the Quakers with whom he deeply disagreed. In fact, at an advanced age, Williams once rode 30 miles just to publicly debate Quaker teachings.

"Roger Williams was not indifferent to the Quakers' theology," Gaustad said. "He opposed it. But he never lifted a finger of civil authority against them."

That kind of heartfelt commitment to religious liberty for all and to the advancement of personal religious beliefs is lost both on the modern-day Religious Right and secularists, he said. The Religious Right -- like their Puritan forebears -- want liberty only for themselves. And strict secularists are indifferent to religion because they find it irrelevant.

"There needs to be freedom of religion not because religion matters so little, but because it matters so much," Gaustad said.

Moving from the colonial settlement to the post-Revolutionary period, Gaustad pointed out that many framers of the Constitution were Enlightenment thinkers who valued reason above revelation.

As a result, the Constitution of 1789 said "zilch" about religion, except for one restraining word about there being "no religious test" for public office, he noted.

"Read the Constitution. It is a secular document," he said. "It was intended to form a secular government, and that's what it did."

Baptists in America soon formed an alliance with Madison and others to secure passage of a Bill of Rights that guaranteed religious liberty as a basic right.

Gaustad said ratification of the First Amendment established the voluntary principle as a guiding force in American religious life. Instead of relying upon government support, churches and other religious organizations have depended upon the support of their own adherents.

"With the Bill of Rights, the voluntary principle became the way of life for religion in America," Gaustad said.

But that principle and the separation of church and state have been "going downhill" in recent days, he lamented. Citing in particular "charitable choice" initiatives, Gaustad said he sees too many churches demonstrating a "readiness to become a department of the government."

"It's not encouraging -- not a happy sign," he said.

-30-

New religions most often singled out for repression

By Ken Camp

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- New religions are the most likely to be repressed by governments or majority faiths, an international authority on the sociology of religion told a Baptist group.

"The kinds of religion most at risk are the alternative, new religious movements," said Eileen Barker, professor of sociology at the London School of Economics.

She presented "International Perspectives on Religious Liberty" at the annual statewide conference of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, held Feb. 12-13 in Austin.

New religious movements tend to be vulnerable, Barker said, because:

-- They are relatively small in number.

-- They are often multi-national or foreign and therefore different than the majority population.

-- There is widespread ignorance and willful distortion regarding their teachings.

-- They often are characterized by "first generation enthusiasms."

Governments sometimes seek to control new faith movements through registration, making legal registration contingent upon length of stay in a country or upon the number of adherents claimed by the religion.

This has been evidenced in Europe after the collapse of communism and the dismantling of the Soviet Union, she observed. In Poland, for example, the number of adherents required for a religion to be registered with the government was increased from 15 to 100.

In addition to the formal repression of new religious movements by governments and state churches, they also are subject to campaigns of misinformation and defamation by the established culture, Barker noted.

"The anti-cult movement sees all new religions as satanic and evil," she said.

The media often reinforces that perception by comparing new sects to extreme cases such as the Jonestown mass suicide or the Branch Davidian standoff in Waco, she said.

Media portrayals, in turn, help feed the distortions of "urban myths" about brainwashing by cultists, Barker added.

-30-

Church-state separation identifies Baptists, Dunn says

By Ken Camp

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- Commitment to separation of church and state is an identifying mark of true Baptists, a church-state scholar and activist told a Baptist gathering.

"I personally and passionately believe that Baptist Christians are an identifiable breed," said James Dunn, visiting professor of Christianity and public policy at Wake Forest Divinity School. "One of our marks is separation of church and state."

Dunn, past executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, spoke on "Religious Liberty as a Baptist Distinctive" at the annual statewide workshop of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, Feb. 12-13 in Austin.

Using the metaphor of a pebble tossed in a pond, he said the three principles -- soul freedom, religious liberty and church-state separation -- are like three concentric circles.

"The center circle is the point of impact, representing the experience of one person with the Divine -- the central act of one's life, an act of God's grace, the immediate engagement of heaven with earth -- soul freedom," Dunn said.

Religious liberty is the second circle, representing the moral, ethical and social result of a saving encounter with God, he explained.

And the outer ring, church-state separation, he said, is the "necessary corollary" to the two inner circles.

"Because human beings are frail and fallible, limited and sinners all; because God has ordained both church and state; because their purposes, constituencies, functions and fundings are different from each other, the separation of church and state follow as night follows day," he said.

Dunn said the Baptist commitment to these principles is theological.

"We root our soul freedom in the very nature and person of God," he said. "We are wired up with a 'chooser,' and we live with the consequences of those choices. In a sense, we are genetically programmed for soul freedom."

Because people are created in the image of God, he continued, "To deny freedom of conscience to any person is to debase God's creation."

A commitment to separation of church and state flows naturally from that conviction, Dunn said.

"True, separation of church and state does not define Baptist theology, but it is a logical, inextricable, inevitable corollary of religious liberty as we know it," he said. "It is the plug which, if pulled out of our machine, the motor dies. We go no more."

Anyone who claims a devotion to religious liberty but questions the validity of church-state separation may be a devout Christian, but that person is not an authentic Baptist, Dunn said.

"If you dismiss the separation of church and state as some irrelevant, optional teaching, I can say you are not a Baptist," he maintained.

-30-

Baptist newspaper woman reflects on 25-year career

By Charlie Warren

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (ABP) -- If Millie Gill had a dollar for every photograph she's taken while covering meetings, groundbreakings, note burnings, church dedications and anniversaries for the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine, she'd be a wealthy woman.

Or if wealth were counted in lasting friendships built through those contacts, she already is.

Gill, recently recognized for 25 years service to the news journal of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, joined the convention staff in December 1975 as a secretary for both the annuity office and the Newsmagazine and as a Newsmagazine staff writer.

"I don't think they gave me a title," Gill said. "I was just the girl who was available to do whatever needed to be done." That pretty well describes what she has been doing ever since.

As executive assistant to the editor in recent years, Gill does all the administrative tasks that title demands, plus she is a writer, photographer, historian and walking encyclopedia of Arkansas Baptist life.

Life dealt her a severe blow before she went to work for Arkansas Baptists. Her husband died the year before, leaving her with a 9-year-old daughter and an overwhelming indebtedness she had known nothing about. Determined to pay off the debt, Gill worked hard, lived frugally and chipped away at the bills until they were paid seven years later.

To her, the Baptist job was an answer to prayer.

"I had asked God to open a door of service for me and he opened the door," Gill recalls.

Born in Missouri, she moved with her family to Yarbro, Ark., a little community north of Blytheville, when she was 4 years old. She grew up in First Baptist Church of Blytheville, graduated from Blytheville High School and worked on the staff of the Blytheville newspaper for 10 years after finishing school.

She married and moved with her husband to Dell, southwest of Blytheville, where she helped him run a farm. They moved to Dallas in December of 1973. He died within a year.

Gill returned to Arkansas and went to work at a school in Dell, where she began to pray for a chance to serve God.

"The Lord answered my prayer through me working at a Baptist summer camp," she said." The director of missions knew I had some journalism experience and knew of the opening here," she continued. "He recommended me for the position. Dr. Sneed (Everett Sneed, then Newsmagazine editor) called me and I came down for an interview with him and Dr. Rucker (T.K. Rucker, annuity secretary). I was hired the day I came."

She has seen quite a few changes since then. Stories were typed on Royal typewriters and sent to the printer to be set into type. Galleys were proofread and sent back to the printer for corrections. Page layouts were done by cutting and pasting typeset galleys onto cardboard layout sheets.

She remembers when the first typesetting equipment arrived. She learned to become a typesetter.

"The photo lab, the typesetting equipment and my office were all in the same room," Gill recalled. "Every time I used the photo lab the moisture would jam up the printer." Today, the whole process is done with desktop publishing.

About 1977, Sneed asked Gill to take over the photo-lab responsibilities, developing film and printing photographs. She agreed, if he would allow her to get the training for the responsibility. She took courses and had one-on-one classes with a photographer who taught her darkroom skills. Don Rutledge, longtime photographer for both the North American and International Mission Boards, also provided photographic training. She continued working on photography skills, attending Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's school of photography 14 times through the years.

She became known as the Newsmagazine photographer. "Many of the people knew me as the lady with the camera," she said. "If I put the camera down they didn't recognize who I was."

Gill has never been bashful about doing whatever it takes to get a good picture. During one annual meeting of the state convention, she asked several people on a church pew to move. She needed their pew. She removed her shoes, stood on the pew, and shot the photo she needed. At one note burning she didn't get what she wanted when the actual note was burned, so she had them burn another piece of paper.

Another task Gill has faithfully performed almost from the beginning of her tenure was to read church newsletters, looking for news to include in the "People and Places" section. That responsibility, along with the people she has met as she traveled the state, is what makes her a walking encyclopedia. She knows hundreds of Arkansas Baptists, remembers their names, and can tell you which church they serve.

"I have concentrated so I would always have that information available when it was needed," she explained. "Doing as many of the staff changes as I do, it helps me keep in place where each of those men are."

But Gill hasn't just made acquaintances. She has made friends.

"One of the things I appreciate more than anything is the number of friends I have made," Gill says of her 25 years.

She has worked with every one of the Newsmagazine's boards of directors and befriended them. She has abiding friendships with people who have come and gone from the Baptist building through the years. She also developed friendships while securing writers for Sunday school lessons and a "Woman's Viewpoint" feature over the years. "I never cease to be amazed that God has provided everything we've ever needed," she said. "It's through the Baptists of Arkansas. He has used them to provide us with prayer support and love and whatever we needed."

One of the Newsmagazine's current board members recently complimented Gill on her ability to relate to people on both sides of the Southern Baptist Convention controversy.

"I really don't like the controversy we have had in the SBC," she said.

Yet her distaste for Baptist politics has not soured her relationships.

During her years, Gill has attended many SBC annual meetings, sometimes covering the event for the Newsmagazine, other years working for the SBC newsroom staff. She has enjoyed visiting headquarters of the WMU, the International Mission Board, the Annuity Board and other SBC institutions.

Another major thrill was a visit to the Holy Land, along with staff members from other state Baptist papers. "It was exciting to walk where Jesus walked," Gill said.

When she is not around to provide instant information about Baptist life, one can go to the indexes she has maintained since 1977 to find what they need.

She has influenced many lives, including the three editors she has assisted, but she is particularly proud of one young man she witnessed to who is now on the mission field.

Beyond her work through the years at the Newsmagazine, her life has focused on her daughter, Lu Ann. In recent years Lu Ann has shared that attention with her husband, Steve Gartrell, and their son, Stephen.

But when Lu Ann was younger, the lines between Newsmagazine and family were blurred. As a single mom, Gill often had to take Lu Ann with her on assignments covering church events.

At one building dedication, the pastor jokingly asked Lu Ann if she wanted to preach the dedication message for him.

"She told him she could, she had heard enough of them," Gill recalled.

I tried to spend as much time on Saturdays doing what she wanted to do as I possibly could. I didn't maintain everything at home as perfectly as it should be, but I tried to devote that day to her, knowing we were going to have to be somewhere on Sunday."

She said LuAnn began to resent having to accompany her to those Baptist meetings about the time she learned to drive. So Millie let her do the driving.

"It was what was needed to keep her happy," Gill said. "While she resented it then, she can look back on it now and see that God was preparing her for her role today."

Gill's son-in-law is a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, preparing for ministry. Lu Ann is well equipped to be a minister's wife, due to her exposure to so many churches through the years. But Lu Ann is also an expert in her field. She earned a bachelor's and master's degree in early childhood education at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Her focus is exceptional children.

Gill is proud of Lu Ann, but mention her 12-year-old grandson and her eyes really light up.

"He's a strong little Christian man," she said.

-30-

END