



# Associated Baptist Press

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### 'God is your boss,' Pulitzer-winning journalist tells Baptist communicators

By Trennis Henderson, David Winfrey and Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Warning that "people can be publicly successful and private failures," Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Angelo Henderson urged Baptist communicators to "go higher" in personal, professional and spiritual growth.

Henderson was a keynote speaker at the 2002 Baptist Communicators Association workshop in Louisville, Ky. BCA, a professional development organization for Baptist communicators, includes members from such areas as journalism, photography, public relations, electronic media and graphic design.

The April 4-6 workshop attracted more than 120 participants from Baptist-related organizations in more than 20 states.

Henderson, a special-projects reporter for the Detroit News, earned the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for feature writing while working with the Detroit bureau of the Wall Street Journal. The article recounted the story of an inner-city pharmacist who shot and killed a robber and the lingering impact of that encounter.

Couching the journalism profession in a larger context, Henderson told the Baptist communicators: "You are on a journey. Some call it journalism; some call it life.

"You can't go higher on this journey if you're carrying excess baggage," he said. "Like an airplane, we can only carry a certain amount of weight. . Anger has got to go. Hurt has got to go. Disappointment has got to go. Bitterness has got to go. Despair has got to go."

Henderson, a deacon at his church in Detroit, emphasized the need to "keep Jesus as your role model."

Don't look for approval from other people, he added. "God is your boss. . You are not there to serve your job. Your job is to serve you as you serve God."

Henderson told about his first job out of college, where the newspaper's business editor told him he needed to find another job and might not be a good fit for journalism.

"That's when the Lord and I entered into a one-on-one relationship," he recalled. "Faith is what keeps us going when travel conditions are unfavorable."

"Journalism and communications remain a way to change the world," he added. "Somebody out there is waiting on you to tell their story."

Other keynote speakers during the three-day conference were Harvey Thomas, press secretary for former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and Larry Ross, spokesman for evangelist Billy Graham.

Thomas warned that many Christians "take the attitude that people ought to listen to us because we are Christians."

"That is rubbish," he declared, noting that Christians must earn the right to be heard in a secular world.

"You need to believe in what you are trying to communicate," he said. It is important for Christian communicators to understand their message and their motivation, he added.

"If there is no response, there is no communication," Thomas pointed out. "If you want to communicate effectively, you've got to start where the other person is. Otherwise, you will never get them to where you are.

"As Christians, we have to get to the heart of the matter" through humility and faith, he suggested.

Citing Psalm 19:14, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer," Thomas said, "What gives us away is 'the mediation of my heart,' what we're thinking on the inside.

"Psalm 19:14 is to me the crux of it all," he concluded. "That's where we end up with two-way communication between us and God."

Ross asked conference participants to consider whether they are consumed by an unhealthy obsession toward their work or whether they are "motivated by the opportunity to reach out to a questioning world."

Ross recalled a time about 10 years ago when he was living on airplanes, "addicted to caffeine and stress."

Work 60 hours a week selling brushes, and people will ask you to reconsider your schedule, he noted. But put in the same hours for a Christian ministry and people will say, "God bless you," he noted.

"I was miserable," he said. "I had a drive, but I had no purpose because I wasn't doing God's will. I was doing my will in God's name."

Ross said he realized that "only a Savior can bring satisfaction."

"I learned that saving the world becomes academic if it comes at the expense of my family," he added. "I had to restructure my priorities."

"What matters most in your life?" he asked. "Do you know Jesus or are you just doing Jesus? Our lamps must be lit, and we need a recommitment to what matters most."

The conference's closing banquet featured BCA's annual Wilmer C. Field Awards Competition. Grand prize winners in the national awards competition were:

-- Arthur S. Davenport Award for exceptional achievement in public relations: Florida Baptist Convention public relations division for the Maguire State Missions Offering.

-- M.E. Dodd Award for exceptional achievement in electronic media: Larry Brannin and Robert Reeves of the Kentucky Baptist Convention for "Kentucky Baptists Touching the World: Europe."

-- M.E. Dodd Award for exceptional achievement in emerging technology: Southern Baptist International Mission Board's Tconline team for Tconline.org.

-- Frank Burkhalter Award for exceptional achievement in news writing: Steve DeVane of the North Carolina Biblical Recorder for "Conservative Group Promotes BSC Takeover."

-- Leonard Holloway Award for exceptional achievement in feature writing: Scott Collins of Buckner Baptist Benevolences for "In Search of the Prodigal."

-- Fon H. Scofield Award for exceptional achievement in publication photography: Russell Dilday of Buckner Baptist Benevolences for "The Kiss."

-- Albert McClellan Award for exceptional achievement in print media and design: LifeWay Christian Resources' LifeWay Church Resources Division advertising and promotion for "Amazon Outfitters VBS Catalog."

## **Kentucky Fellowship joins groups collecting transitional funds for resigning missionaries**

By Trennis Henderson

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- The Kentucky Baptist Fellowship has joined a growing list of moderate groups pledging to provide financial aid to international missionaries who resign rather than sign an affirmation of the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message."

KBF Coordinator John Lepper said the group's executive committee established a fund at the request of an anonymous donor who contributed \$1,000.

The fund specifically will assist missionaries with Kentucky connections, including those from Kentucky, those who served churches in the state and those who attended school there.

Some missionaries object to being asked by Southern Baptist International Mission Board President Jerry Rankin to affirm the revised faith statement.

Rankin has indicated missionaries who decline to sign the affirmation will not be fired or forced to resign. He added, however, that IMB leaders have not determined what the consequences will be for missionaries who do not sign.

Leaders of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, already at odds with Southern Baptist Convention leaders over the faith-statement revisions, responded in February by establishing a fund to support missionaries who resign or are fired for refusing to affirm the statement. The Texas Baptist fund was launched with pledges totaling \$1 million.

While the KBF fund will be an independent effort for the benefit of Kentucky-related missionaries, moderate groups in several other states have announced plans to forward gifts to the fund established by Texas Baptists.

Mainstream Baptist groups in Alabama, Oklahoma and South Carolina have announced plans to collect and forward funds to the Texas Baptist effort. Baptists in Oklahoma already have pledged \$250,000, according to Bruce Prescott, executive director of Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists.

Leaders of Arkansas Baptists Committed have announced plans to launch a "Save the Missionaries Fund," noting that they will "partner with other groups establishing similar funds to collectively pool resources for these missionaries."

While critics say requiring all missionaries to affirm the "Baptist Faith and Message" is unbaptistic, supporters say it isn't a new policy and that Southern Baptists have a right to hold their missionaries to orthodox views.

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## **BGCT and Mexican Baptists explore ongoing relationship**

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Leaders of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the National Baptist Convention of Mexico are exploring ways their two conventions can develop an ongoing formal missions relationship.

Members of the BGCT state missions commission learned at their April 9 meeting in Dallas about the proposed "open-ended" missions partnership between Baptists in Texas and Mexico.

Unlike other missions partnerships that typically have a defined beginning and ending date, this relationship would be developed with no end in sight, according to Don Sewell, director of the Texas Partnerships Resource Center.

"What we are talking about is more than a partnership. It is a collaboration from here to eternity, in essence," Sewell told the commission.

BGCT Executive Director Charles Wade said he sees the emerging relationship between Texas and Mexico Baptists as the logical next step beyond the longstanding River Ministry program along the Rio Grande.

"Why can't we build on that platform for ministry to the whole nation of Mexico?" Wade said. "Perhaps we could do missions in a new kind of way."

Antonio Estrada, president of the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas, said the keys to the developing relationship are shared vision and a sense that all involved are equal partners.

Estrada said there are 56 indigenous groups in Mexico, and nearly two dozen of those people groups remain unreached by the Christian gospel. He also pointed out that there are more than 6 million Hispanics in Texas -- roughly one-third of the state's total population -- and a sizeable number are not evangelical Christians.

Baptist leaders in Mexico are interested in a relationship with Texas Baptists that will be mutually beneficial, not paternalistic. "They want to work with us as partners and for us to look them in the eyes as brothers in Christ," said Estrada, pastor of Iglesia Bautista South Main in Houston.

Leadership exchange would be a key component of the partnership. Estrada announced a proposed plan to invite 1,000 Baptist preachers from Mexico to come to Texas to lead evangelistic crusades in Hispanic Texas Baptist churches.

He also mentioned the possibility of working closely with Baptist seminaries in Mexico City and Oxaca to enhance theological training and ministerial training.

Officials from the National Baptist Convention of Mexico plan to attend the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas in El Paso, June 24-26.

## **Jury rules against church in wrongful-death suit**

By Malinda Hallman McGill

COLUMBIANA, Ala. (ABP) -- A Baptist church in Alabama has been ordered to pay \$950,000 to the family of a 16-year-old boy who drowned while on a mission trip in 2000.

A jury in Baldwin County awarded punitive damages April 3 in a wrongful-death suit against First Baptist Church of Columbiana, Ala.

Terry White drowned May 31, 2000, while on a mission trip with other youth to three migrant camps. The group, from a number of Shelby County churches, stayed at the Lutheran-owned Camp Dixie in Baldwin County.

White's family claimed the accident could have been avoided if the church had had a lifeguard on duty. The jury agreed, awarding them just under half the amount they had sought in their \$2 million lawsuit.

Mike Miller, pastor of the church, said the jury "basically said the church deserved to be punished for a tragic accident."

White was a member of Providence Baptist Church in Shelby County but had been involved with the youth group at First Baptist in Columbiana, and went on the trip to share the gospel with migrant workers.

"Some of the boys were walking in knee-deep water at the camp about 100 yards from the shore," Miller said. "There's only one small area in the bay that's deeper than that where they dredged the place for sand. There was no cry for help, no struggle and no splashing. We think he just slipped into that hole. I don't think even a lifeguard would have noticed it or helped. The boys just thought he had gone inside or to play."

"It was a tragic, unforeseen, unexplainable accident. No one was at fault," he said. "You can't control every circumstance that may occur -- with children or adults."

Miller said Alabama law is based on what a reasonable church would do in the same circumstances. He said he fears the jury's decision could set a dangerous precedent for churches in Alabama, and feels blessed because his congregation has insurance that will cover the amount.

Miller said they have no bitterness toward White's family. "I'm sure they'd rather have their son back than have \$950,000," he said. "This is a tragic time for them, and I don't blame them. If I were going through the same situation, I'd be searching for answers, too. I know they're hurting."

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