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**Baptists need to rehab image to reach non-believers, Seay says**

**By John Hall**

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ARLINGTON, Texas (ABP) – Baptists must rediscover the heart of Jesus to overcome their image and heal those who have been scarred by past outreach attempts, said Chris Seay, pastor of the innovative Houston church Ecclesia.

Many Baptists have failed to understand and deal with the perceptions non-Christians commonly have, Seay said at the recent Texas Evangelism Conference. Baptists fail to understand why nonbelievers view many evangelistic efforts as a threat, he continued.

The common image of Baptists that nonbelievers glean from the media is a group of infighters and arguers, Seay argued. "People don't want to be part of a group where they hear you are fighting and bickering," he said. "We have to deal with our own issues."

Past evangelistic efforts have also given Baptists a bad reputation, Seay added. Some nonbelievers feel Baptists have pretended to be their friend to convert them. When they did not respond as hoped, the Baptist broke off the relationship, he continued.

Trying to convert people by threatening them with damnation also damaged the Baptist image, Seay said. While the approach may initially have gotten children to pray to Jesus for salvation, many have come to resent Baptists for the effort.

"That's not what I love [about] my God," Seay said. "It has nothing to do with escaping the flames of hell. That's a side benefit. The God I love has a message of love and servanthood."

The church needs to rethink what it means to be a Christian, Seay says. True entrance into the faith brings a person into a relationship with Jesus and a Christian community.

"We're going to have to think about what it means to be in the faith," Seay said. "To say a prayer, does that mean you're in the faith? No!"

Many presuppositions about evangelism that Baptists have held on to since the 1950s are no longer true, Seay said. For instance, evangelistic tracts have largely become ineffective because there is a large contingent of people who simply do not know anything about Jesus' story, Seay said. "The Roman Road' is much longer than four stoplights."

Many people today are craving love after suffering through a tumultuous family life filled with neglect, he said. Christians need to respond to this need as Jesus would – by sincerely meeting their desire.

"We've got to begin where they're asking," he taught. "In that dialog, we're going to become friends and something is going to happen."

Baptists' duty is not to straighten out the morals of other people, but to share the gospel with others, Seay stated. Too often Baptists require people to meet a moral standard. But no one meets the sinless standard of Jesus, said Seay, who ministers in a largely gay sector of Houston.

The Holy Spirit will convict people of sin in their lives, he said. "They're going to get their stuff together after you and your people love on them."

**Respect, relationships crucial to Hispanics, speaker says****By Ken Camp****Associated Baptist Press - [www.abpnews.com](http://www.abpnews.com)****January 30, 2003****Volume: 03-09-3431**

ARLINGTON, Texas (ABP) – Anglo Christians need to understand one thing if they want to reach Hispanics with the gospel. It's spelled R-E-S-P-E-C-T, according to Gus Reyes, ethnic evangelism consultant with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

"Saving face is a huge issue in the Hispanic culture," Reyes told participants at a seminar held in conjunction with the Texas Evangelism Conference Jan. 27-28. "Never challenge a Hispanic person in public – never. When we embarrass someone publicly, we're telling them they are not important."

Reyes identified four distinct Hispanic cultures in the United States: first-generation immigrants; bicultural people with "one foot in and one foot out" of their culture of origin; individuals who have been assimilated into mainstream Anglo culture; and an "emerging culture" that has been assimilated but is deciding which elements of Hispanic culture and which elements of mainstream Anglo culture it wants to claim as its own.

While the distinctive traits of Hispanic culture are most clearly evident among first-generation immigrants, they also are present even among the most assimilated individuals, he noted.

Hispanic culture values hierarchy, titles and formality, while mainstream Anglo culture in the U.S. is more egalitarian and informal, Reyes observed.

A pastor visiting an Anglo family might dress informally, call members of the host family by their first names, and invite them to address him by his first name, thinking that would be an effective way to remove barriers and make everyone feel at ease, he noted. But a Hispanic family would interpret the lack of formality as a lack of respect, and they would feel ill at ease calling a minister by his first name.

Hispanics tend to communicate indirectly rather than directly in order to avoid embarrassing themselves or anyone else, Reyes explained. "More is said than is actually said."

Unlike the "get to the point," "don't waste my time" mainstream American culture, Hispanics value context and relationships above time and tasks. First-generation Hispanics, in particular, "see Anglos as being slaves to time," and they want no part of that bondage, he said.

"The Hispanic person won't say it, but he's thinking, 'Don't look at your watch when you visit me. If you are in a hurry, you don't have time for me. Don't even bother,'" Reyes said.

"Be flexible. Relationships are more important than starting on time. The party begins when we get there, and it usually lasts longer than you expect."

While mainstream Anglo culture values individualism and independence, Hispanic culture is "one for all and all for one," he said.

The appropriate question to ask in greeting an Anglo may be, "How are you?" But Reyes said the right question to ask a Hispanic is "How is your family?" And in the Hispanic culture, that means the extended family.



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**Illinois pastor pleads guilty to criminal sexual assault****By Michael Leathers****Associated Baptist Press - [www.abpnews.com](http://www.abpnews.com)****January 30, 2003****Volume: 03-09-3432**

OLNEY, Ill. (ABP) – The pastor of a southeastern Illinois church pleaded guilty Jan. 27 to two counts of criminal sexual assault involving a teenage girl.

Leslie Mason, 35, former pastor of Olney Southern Baptist Church, struck a deal with prosecutors in which he pleaded guilty to the two class-one felonies in exchange for the dismissal of eight remaining counts, which included charges that he had sex with another teenage girl attending his church.

A sentencing hearing has been scheduled for March 17. Mason faces a prison term of four to 30 years, depending on whether the sentences run concurrently, and a fine of up to \$5,000. Under Illinois law, he will have to serve at least 85 percent of his sentence, a legal advocate said.

Mason had been pastor of the Olney church since 1994. Church members unanimously agreed to dismiss him during a special meeting in October 2001, according to a copy of the church's minutes on file in the Richland County Circuit Clerk's office.

The minutes say that Mason admitted his guilt to church deacons. A motion from the deacon body and the personnel committee said Mason should be dismissed because he used "a most trusted position in our church to pursue and manipulate a 13-year-old girl for sexual gratification and that he continued to use his authority to exploit and to maintain an atmosphere of fear and intimidation for a period of approximately seven years."

One of Mason's victims acknowledged in an e-mail to him, also on file at the courthouse, that she accepted his apology but questioned if he was truly sorry for the hurt he had inflicted. "But, if it really hurt you that bad, this would have stopped long before I even turned 14," the e-mail read.

Mason was first charged with two counts of criminal sexual assault on Oct. 31, 2001, just days before the Illinois Baptist State Association's annual meeting in Peoria. After learning about those charges, IBSA officials quickly sought to have Mason's name removed as the candidate to preach the annual sermon the following year.

Mason had been vice chairman of the IBSA's constitution-and-bylaws committee. He was also spokesman for a group of conservative pastors. He was appointed to the national Southern Baptist Convention's committee on committees in 1997.

Messengers attending IBSA's annual meeting last November passed a resolution condemning sexual abuse. The person on the resolutions committee who drafted the resolution said the charges against Mason were not a factor in developing it.

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**Oklahoma pastor elected Illinois executive director****By Michael Leathers****Associated Baptist Press - [www.abpnews.com](http://www.abpnews.com)****January 30, 2003****Volume: 03-09-3433**

CARLINVILLE, Ill. (ABP) – Wendell Lang, a pastor from Pryor, Okla., has been confirmed as the 10th executive director of the Illinois Baptist State Association.

The 46-year-old Lang has been pastor of First Baptist Church of Pryor since 1989. He was elected during a special meeting Jan. 28 of the IBSA board of directors. The board's secret ballot vote of 55-2 easily topped the two-thirds majority needed for approval. He begins his new duties in February.

In November 2001 Lang completed his second one-year term as president of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. He earned a doctor of ministry degree in 1987 from Phillips University in Enid, Okla., and a master of divinity degree in 1981 from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He and his wife, Pamela, have two children, Lance and Leah.

Lang replaces Bob Wiley, who stepped down in October 2001 after a tumultuous relationship with some IBSA-elected leaders during the last two years of his five-year tenure.

Although Lang's exact salary was not made public, he will earn somewhere "below the midpoint" of the newly established salary range for the executive director, according to a recommendation from the IBSA executive director search committee. That means he'll be paid somewhere between \$83,520 and \$102,312.

Glenn Akins, IBSA's former manager of strategic planning and associational services, has led the state association during its leadership transition. His place in the association remains unclear because his former position was eliminated during an organizational restructuring, and messengers to the annual state convention meeting last November eliminated funding for the newly created position of associate executive director, widely viewed by many Illinois Baptist insiders as a job created for Akins.



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