The Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth
The first decade of fulfilling the Great Commission
At its very heart, Christianity is a missionary faith driven by evangelistic fervor. With the glory of God as our consuming purpose and vision, the church’s evangelistic mandate is driven by a desire to see God’s glory in the salvation of sinners and the evangelization of the nations.

The Apostle Paul presented the Christians in Rome with a comprehensive theological argument to help that congregation understand the centrality of evangelism and the power of the Gospel. The apostle’s words to the Christians in Rome should remind Christians in all places and in all times of the magnificent urgency of the Gospel message. Repeating the prophet Joel’s promise that “whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved,” Paul went on to instruct that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). The sinner’s duty is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ — and the Christian’s duty is to share the Gospel with passion, urgency, clarity, and power.

The logic of Paul’s argument is invincible. “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14)

Paul’s argument lays out like this: Sinners cannot respond to a Gospel they have not heard. Lost persons will not hear the Gospel unless someone communicates the Gospel. This is not going to happen, unless the church makes evangelism and missions central priorities, thus sending out its members in active pursuit of those who so desperately need to hear the Gospel.

An oft-neglected portion of this text offers a powerful insight into the church’s privilege in evangelism. Repeating the words God spoke through Moses in Deuteronomy 30:14, Paul presented the Romans with the nearness of the Word of God. “But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your hear’ — that is the word of faith which we are preaching” (Romans 10:8).

The “nearness” of the word is essential to Paul’s argument. Having heard and received the Gospel, the Christians in Rome were reminded that someone had brought the word near to them — otherwise they would never had heard the Gospel themselves. In the same way, our Christian responsibility is to bring the word of the Gospel near to others, that they may also believe. This nearness of the word underlines both our responsibility and our privilege as believers. One of the great challenges faced by the Christian church in every generation is the task of taking the word of the Gospel near a lost and dying world.

As the Billy Graham School of Mission, Evangelism, and Church Growth celebrates its tenth anniversary, we can now look back at a decade of solid achievement, academic transformation, and worldwide impact. The school can now claim well over a thousand graduates, including commissioned missionaries serving all over the world, church planters engaged in front-line ministry, and a multitude of pastors leading churches with Great Commission vision. Furthermore, The Billy Graham School has functioned within Southern Seminary as a catalyst for the evangelistic vision and Great Commission passion throughout the entire institution. Under the leadership of Dean Thom S. Rainer, the Billy Graham School is setting the pace for the world of theological education as it has developed innovative programs that combine the most modern approaches to global communications and impact with the never-changing eternal power of the Gospel. Without compromise, The Billy Graham School stands for unquestioned theological integrity even as it sets the world within its sights and seizes the moment for Great Commission opportunities.

Through the ministry of this school, Southern Seminary is even more committed to the task of bringing the word of Christ near to the peoples of the world. Based on its first ten years of service, we now face the future — a future framed by unprecedented opportunity and fueled by unleashed passion.
2
A Great Commission thrust

4 An interview with Thom Rainer

8 Personal evangelism for the 21st century
By Timothy Beougher

12 Going into all the world
By Mark Terry

14 Student Focus: Norman Chung
From the military to the ministry

16 Faculty Focus: Chuck Lawless
Lawless fulfills lifelong dream to teach

18 Alumni Focus: Buddy Hunt
Southern trustee has balanced approach to ministry

21 Southern Seminary News

31 News from the lives of Southern Seminary alumni

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A Great Commission thrust
By Jeff Robinson

When R. Albert Mohler Jr. assumed the presidency of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1993, he soon realized that the seminary needed to update its vision for fulfilling the Great Commission.

"It was clear that in this new generation we needed to do far more in terms of missions and evangelism," said Mohler. "We also wanted to develop a theologically-driven concept of church growth that would assist our churches and provide real leadership, not only in the United States, but around the world."

Mohler began to develop a vision for a new school that would both reflect the historical Southern Baptist passion for missions and evangelism and also prepare the church for the unique challenges of ministry in the 21st century.

"In many ways, we wanted to recover something that had been lost in our own denomination and among many evangelicals and that was an approach to evangelism, missions and church growth that was unapologetically directed to the glory of God and was bold to take advantage of new opportunities that had emerged in the 1990s for visionary Christian leadership and witness."

Thus Southern’s school of missions, evangelism and church growth was born. And one name seemed to fit the school’s mission: legendary evangelist Billy Graham.

"We were so greatly honored that Dr. Graham was excited about this prospect," Mohler said. "He had been very encouraging to me as I came to take leadership of this school. He had a very personal interest in Southern Seminary.

"It just seemed right for this new school to be named for Dr. Graham, given his ties to Southern Seminary, his ties to the SBC and his heart as represented in what we were attempting to do through this school."

"It meant a great deal to us, far beyond what we can describe for Dr. Graham to come and speak at my inauguration in 1993, to be there when the school was announced, to give it his public and personal support and we’re glad to have been able to maintain those connections over these years."

When searching for the man to be the founding dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth, the name of a particular Alabama pastor kept coming to Mohler’s mind — Thom Rainer.

The two had become acquainted while they were students at Southern. "I had known Thom at a distance when we were seminary students together," Mohler said. "I held him in great respect. I knew of his ministry in Alabama and his writings as well and I was absolutely convinced that this was the man who would lead Southern Baptists and evangelicals in a recovery of true biblical church growth and boldness in evangelism as we move into the 21st century."

"I well remember my first conversation with Thom Rainer about the prospect and there was an immediate meeting of the minds and joining of hearts as we shared a common vision for this school. And from that very first conversation, I was assured all over again that we had found the right man. We were thrilled when Dr. Rainer assumed this position and became the founding dean and the rest, as they say, is history."

The 10-year history of the Graham School has been one of profound growth under Rainer's guidance. Rainer has provided thoughtful leadership that has served not only the Graham School but also the entire seminary, Mohler said.

"He is a constant generator of ideas — all of them good — and he has a fertile mind, a comprehensive heart, and a strategic discipline to get things done."

"Thom has demonstrated stellar Christian leadership in more than one dimension. First of all, he is a member of our Executive Cabinet. He’s a part of everything the seminary does in terms of senior leadership. And he is the dean of one of the fastest-growing programs in history of theological education. So, from an inside perspective, Thom Rainer's leadership is seen in the fact that he is one of the most creative and thoughtful leaders I have ever known."

Rainer has penned numerous acclaimed books on church growth including "Surprising Insights from the Unchurched," "Effective Evangelistic Churches;" and his latest, "The Unchurched Next Door."

While some elements within the church growth movement have emphasized pragmatic methodologies while de-emphasizing the place of Scripture in determining how "do church," Rainer’s writings have served to call the church back to the basics of expository preaching and teaching biblical doctrine, Mohler said.

Rainer’s works have exerted influence far beyond Southern Seminary and the Southern Baptist Convention, Mohler added.

"There are literally thousands of pastors far beyond the reach of this institution (Southern Seminary), or even of the Southern Baptist Convention who look to Thom Rainer as the recognized expert in the field of evangelism and church growth," Mohler said. "And through his research and writing, Thom has established an international reputation that is exceedingly well-deserved."

"I think of his work in refuting many of the myths concerning church growth. Thom has come back again and again to affirm that it is the basics of expository preaching, Bible teaching, and confrontational witness that makes for strong and growing churches.

"There is no surprise in that because that is the very pattern found in the New Testament. But it is extremely important to have a scholar and researcher of Thom's stature to make clear the fact that churches in our generation that are growing and showing authentic long-term maturity are those that give attention to the basics."

Mohler said that the Graham School is part of the fabric of Southern’s overall mission and operates as part of a complementary relationship with the seminary’s other schools.

"In so many ways, the structure of this institution is much like the difference in functions of the human anatomy," Mohler said. "Different parts of the body have different functions, but it is virtually impossible to imagine a healthy body without all of them working together. In a very real sense, the Billy Graham School provides us the eyes of vision for Southern Seminary, looking out at the world, both in terms of North America and far beyond."
An interview with Thom Rainer
An interview with Thom Rainer

Southern Seminary Magazine

Thom Rainer: No. I wish I could take some of the credit, but I was not involved in the vision to create the school. In fact, I found out about this new school when I was a pastor in Birmingham, Ala. On the front page of the local paper in October 1993 was an article about Dr. Mohler’s installation as the ninth president of Southern Seminary. In that article, the paper cited Dr. Mohler’s vision to create the school. Dr. Billy Graham had spoken at the special services at Freedom Hall, and he had given Dr. Mohler permission to use his name for the school.

The TIE: What was your reaction to the article?

Rainer: I have to admit that my heart leaped when I read about Dr. Mohler’s vision. I remember taking the article to my wife Nellie Jo and telling her that the luckiest man in the world had the opportunity to be the first dean of that school. If I had thought I had a chance to get that position, I would have called a dozen friends and asked them to recommend me. I really did not think that such an opportunity would come my way, so I tried to forget about it. Dr. Mohler said a national search for a dean would ensue. I was not sure that a national search could find Birmingham.

The TIE: What was your reaction when you were first contacted?

Rainer: What is greater than “ecstatic”? Never in my life and ministry have I been more excited about an opportunity. The initial contact was an offer to be interviewed among several other candidates. Even at that point, I did not really feel that I would be the finalist for the position. I remember when Dr. Mohler finally offered me the opportunity to be the first dean of the Billy Graham School. I told him I would need to pray about it. Two minutes later I accepted the position.

The TIE: What were the early days of the Graham School like?

Rainer: To paraphrase a better-known author, it was the best of times and the worst of times. The seminary went through some difficult times and transitions in the mid-1990s. Dr. Mohler was the primary target of some tough criticisms. I did not receive the criticism nearly to the level he did, but I was his first academic hire, his first academic dean and his first professor. I received my share of the criticisms. The environment was not always conducive to creative thinking.

The TIE: But you did say it was also the best of times.

Rainer: Absolutely. Vocationally, I have never had greater joys in my life than I have experienced as the Graham School dean. I had six months to start a new school. When I arrived on the job on Feb. 1, 1994, a startling though crossed my mind. I was about to be dean of a school. I had to start asking people what a dean does. I am still asking that question today.

The TIE: What took place in those six months prior to the opening of the school?

Rainer: The Graham School had a small number of faculty members that transferred from the School of Theology. We began meeting to develop a curriculum, to cast vision for the school and to recruit our first students. That is a point that needs to be made clear. The work of starting the Graham School was never a one-man show. A team of faculty members worked hundreds of hours to get the school operational. Dr. Mark Terry was a key friend, ally and worker during those critical months. I could not have survived as dean without people like him at critical points.

The TIE: The school then opened on Aug. 1, 1994. What was it like?

Rainer: In the midst of tensions on campus, the Graham School became a place of joy and fun. We started with 33 students and have more than 600 today. Those first students were men and women I will never forget. Because the school is so much larger today, I do not have the opportunity to get to know all of them well. But I knew almost every student very well in those early days. My office was a hangout for the small group that started with the school. We had a very nice dedicatory service for the school and for my installation as dean, but the real excitement was working with the new students and the faculty.

The TIE: Let’s move to the present. What are some common questions that people ask you about the Graham School?

Rainer: I guess the most common question is: How is the Graham School different than the School of Theology? My first response to that question is to acknowledge with gratitude our dependence on the School of Theology. Our original faculty came from the School of Theology. Dr. Mohler, in addition to his role as president, serves on the faculty of the School of Theology. The three men who have served as dean of the School of Theology have been great supporters of the Graham School. I am ever grateful for the support of all three men: Dr. David Dockery, Dr. Danny Akin and Dr. Russell Moore. Also, over one-half of the Graham School curriculum is taught by School of Theology professors. The relationship between the two schools is very healthy.

The TIE: But there are obviously differences, or there would not be two different schools.

Rainer: Yes. Most of the differences lie in the emphases of the degree programs. The Graham School has a clear and obvious focus on Great Commission ministries and practical or applied ministry training. For example, a pastor who sees the need for more extensive training in classical disciplines would probably seek a master of divinity degree in the School of Theology.
ology. Another pastor who seeks training in Great Commission ministries might choose the Graham School master of divinity degree. Both are excellent paths to take. He would not go wrong choosing either program.

**The TIE:** What types of relationships does the Graham School have with other entities and agencies in the Southern Baptist Convention and beyond?

**Rainer:** Our three primary relationships are with the International Mission Board (IMB) and the North American Mission Board (NAMB) in the Southern Baptist Convention, and with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) outside the denomination. We also have a good relationship with LifeWay because of our conviction that healthy and biblical church growth can take place in the Sunday School. The primary contact for LifeWay, however, is the School of Leadership and Church Ministry. Other relationships with state conventions, associations and parachurch groups are too numerous to mention.

**The TIE:** What exactly is the relationship with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association since the school carries Dr. Graham's name?

**Rainer:** Though no official relationship exists, from the onset we in the Graham School have taken the initiative to maintain an informal relationship of accountability with BGEA. We want the only graduate school in the world that carries Dr. Graham’s name to live up to the high level of integrity exemplified by the famed evangelist and his organization. In the early years of our school, I had monthly telephone meetings with Dr. T. W. Wilson of the BGEA, one of Dr. Graham’s closest friends. Dr. Wilson is now with the Lord, but he was a great friend of our school. I miss him greatly. I remember the first meeting I had with Dr. Graham. His first words to me were: “I am honored to see you.” I almost fell over backwards! The man’s humility and integrity are genuine.

**The TIE:** The International Mission Board is the largest mission-sending agency in history. How do you relate to this group?

**Rainer:** Our relationship with the IMB is multifaceted; it is difficult to know where to begin. All of our missions professors served on the mission field with the IMB. At the inception of our school, we contacted the IMB to help shape our vision and curriculum. We have had numerous partnerships with the agency. Our 2 + 2 and 2 + 3 master of divinity programs combine on-campus training with on-the-field training over a four to five-year period. The faculty and our students regularly travel and serve for short periods all over the world in partnership with the IMB. We are committed to being the premier theological training school for international missionaries. Under the leadership of our great missions faculty, I believe we have made great strides in that direction.

**The TIE:** What is the nature of the school’s relationship with the North American Mission Board?

**Rainer:** Again, the relationships are so many with both NAMB and its predecessor organization, the Home Mission Board, that it is difficult to know where to begin. I guess our most active relationship today is with Nehemiah Project, where our church planting professor serves as an employee of both NAMB and Southern Seminary. The most visible aspect of this program is the 2 + 2 concept — two years on-campus training and two years on-the-field training. These students are ultimately appointed as NAMB church planting missionaries.

**The TIE:** What have been your greatest joys and greatest frustrations serving as the only dean of the Graham School?

**Rainer:** The greatest joys are always associated with the people God has given me the honor to serve alongside. The greatest frustration is the fact that the day only has 24 hours. We have so many opportunities in the Graham School faculty. I know I am biased, but I really believe it. I also have a great respect for and great relationship with other faculty members at Southern. You will not find a more godly and more qualified group of men and women anywhere. I also enjoy those students with a Great Commission heart. We have some of the greatest students in the world at Southern. And I cannot overlook my relationship with the leadership that serves on Southern’s Executive Cabinet. Some of my closest friendships have been with the leadership team at Southern.

**The TIE:** Any frustrations?

**Rainer:** I guess the single greatest frustration is the fact that the day only has 24 hours. We have so many opportunities in the Graham School. Hardly a week goes by that someone or some organization does not contact us about some partnership. I want to say “yes” to all of them, but our resources simply will not let that happen. Countless times I find myself in Dr. Chuck Lawless’s office, talking about proposed opportunities and looking at the vision for other opportunities. I wish we had the time to do everything we want to do.

**The TIE:** You speak often and have written 15 books. How do those ministries relate to the Graham School?

**Rainer:** God has given me the wonderful opportunity to write and speak around the world. Those venues have been key factors in the recruiting of students and the promotion of the school. The visibility and the platform associated with speaking and writing are blessings for both me and the school. I just spoke at a large church in South Carolina. The pastor introduced me by saying, “Like many people, I first came to know of the Billy Graham School through the speaking and writings of Thom Rainer.” I am greatly encouraged to hear such words.

**The TIE:** More than 10 years have passed since you first came to Southern. Have there been many surprises?

**Rainer:** In many ways everything has been a surprise, because I really did not know what to expect when I first came here. But most of the surprises have been surprises of joy. I
have been blessed far beyond my expectations and far beyond what I deserve.

**The TIE: You are a student of the local church. You write books on the church and you are often cited in Christian and secular publications as an expert on the church. What are the challenges the American church in particular faces today?**

**Rainer:** One of my greatest concerns about the local church is the low level of emphasis in two key and related areas: the doctrine of exclusivity and the doctrine of hell. The doctrine of exclusivity holds to the reality of John 14:6, that explicit faith in Christ is the only way of salvation. Many in the church have bought into the politically-correct worldview of religious tolerance. They are uncomfortable talking about the narrow way clearly depicted in the New Testament for fear of being labeled narrow-minded or intolerant. Closely related to this issue is the lack of teaching on the doctrine of a literal hell. If we minimize either of those doctrines, we lose our evangelistic fervor. One cannot have the same passion for the Gospel if he or she believes that other religions are equal paths to God, or if one does not believe that Christ is the only way of salvation.

**The TIE: You mentioned earlier that Dr. Mohler was the person who first had the vision to create the Graham School. How do you and the school relate to him today?**

**Rainer:** The Billy Graham School could have no greater friend and leader than Dr. Mohler. It was his vision that established the school, and he continues to be a tremendous ally and supporter today. Countless times I have presented ideas to him that were a bit out of the box, but he always gave us a chance to try something new. Probably the greatest contribution President Mohler makes to the Graham School is his own passion for the Gospel. I hear him share with us regularly about his own personal witnessing opportunities. And it was Dr. Mohler who led the seminary to require a course in personal evangelism in all degree programs. I am indebted to him for his leadership and friendship.

**The TIE: The phrase “church growth” seems to carry a lot of baggage today. Yet it is a part of the Graham School’s name. How does the Graham School define church growth?**

**Rainer:** In simplest terms, we define church growth as evangelism that results in fruit-bearing disciples in the local church. I am well aware that church growth advocates receive abundant criticism in the evangelical world. Much of the criticism is deserved. Many of the church growth advocates today encourage a type of growth that has little biblical foundation. Marketing, methodologies and the latest growth fad describe the literature of much of church growth today. But those who confuse Graham School church growth with biblically-weak church growth simply do not know who we are. In fact, we have often been accused of being “too concerned about the Bible and doctrine” by some church growth advocates. My word to the critics is: do not lump all church growth advocates together. There are many so-called theologians today who advocate a heretical theology. But we do not say that all theologians are heretics because of the aberrations of a few. Such is the case with church growth advocates. Many of us work from a clear and strong biblical foundation.

**The TIE: What is your vision for the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth for the next 10 years?**

**Rainer:** In many ways my vision for the Graham School is clearer than it has ever been. I often think that in the dispensing of spiritual gifts, I received the dominant spiritual gift of ignorance. There is so much that I do not know, including in areas of leading an academic school. But God seems to be giving me a more focused vision the past two years. We will continue to strive to be the best Great Commission training school in theological education. That will not change. But I am seeing the innovative delivery of theological education to be a key component of the vision as well. We have done so much already. We introduced both the weekend master of divinity program and a new evening master of divinity program. We created a new paradigm for teaching the doctor of ministry degree that resulted in the number of students increasing sevenfold in that program. We, along with the School of Theology, started a degree program for laypersons. We introduced Internet courses to the seminary. And we started an extension degree program that partners with a local church, where all of the students are interns in that church. Also, as I noted earlier, we began 2 + 2 and 2 + 3 programs with both of the mission agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention. But we have so many more opportunities and possibilities that an entire lifetime may not be enough time to get to all of them.

**The TIE: Is there anything else you would like to say?**

**Rainer:** How many hours do you have? Seriously, the honor to serve as the first and, for now, only dean of the Billy Graham School is a life’s dream for me. It is an unspeakable joy to wake up each morning with a passion to do the work that God has called me to do. And though this article has been an interview with me, so many other people deserve accolades and credit for their indispensable roles in making the Graham School what it is today. My only hesitancy in naming each of them is the fear that I will leave someone out. What an unbelievable team God has given us at this school! One day, in my older years, I will look back on this opportunity and marvel at God’s goodness all over again. It has been an incredible ride thus far, but I really believe the best is yet to come. Only God knows the impact of this school in the scope of His plan, but I have to believe it is far beyond my greatest imagination. What a great school. What a great God. To Him alone be the glory.
Personal evangelism for the 21st Century
Last July America’s attention was drawn to a western Pennsylvania coal mine where 9 miners were trapped 240 feet underground in a cramped, partially flooded mineshaft. News stations brought live updates around the clock during the 3 days of efforts to rescue the trapped men.

Finally, on July 28th, just before 1:00 a.m., 43-year-old Randall Fogle was brought to the surface. The remaining 8 miners were rescued over the next 2 hours to the collective relief of the entire nation. Pennsylvania governor Mark Schweiker noted that over 200 people had been vitally involved in the rescue effort to save the lives of these 9 men. Over 200 people dropped whatever they had been doing to devote themselves to rescuing fellow human beings from certain disaster.

God calls every believer to be involved in spiritually rescuing persons. As significant as the rescue of these miners was, each of those men will die one day and then face judgment (Heb 9:27). We can do nothing greater for other human beings than to introduce them to the One who can rescue them for all eternity, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So how can we engage in that task? What should guide our personal evangelism in the 21st century? I would like to reflect on the challenge before us by considering six key themes: the Multitudes, the Mandate, the Message, the Methods, the Messengers, and the Manner.

The Multitudes
As we reflect on the evangelistic task at the beginning of the 21st century, we face a different milieu than at the beginning of the 20th century. What can we observe about the multitudes in the year 2004?

We must first be reminded that people who do not know Jesus Christ are lost and headed for an eternal hell (John 3:18; Acts 4:12). That theological reality, affirmed by Jesus and the apostles in the 1st century, is still true today. We also recognize the truth that, left to ourselves, “no one seeks after God” (Rom 3:11). Because of our sin we (like Adam) run away from God instead of to Him. As Paul observes, “And even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:3-4).

While it is true that no lost person seeks after God in the right way with the right motives, the world is filled with persons who are searching spiritually. The failures of materialism and hedonism to bring ultimate meaning and purpose in life have caused many to undertake a “spiritual” quest for ultimate answers. As Blaise Pascal observed, there is a “God-shaped vacuum” in every person’s heart — and a God-shaped vacuum can only be filled with God.

As we observe the multitudes, it is obvious that 21st century Americans who undertake a “spiritual quest” no longer automatically begin with Christianity. Survey after survey shows the average American believes that all religions are basically the same, that all serve as pathways to “God.” To say that spiritual confusion abounds in this pluralistic environment would be a great understatement. As many have observed, we have a culture filled not so much with “agnostics,” but with “ignostics” — people ignorant of the basic truths of Christianity. Like Paul, we have the opportunity to explain the “Unknown God” to our society (Acts 17:22ff).

As I reflect on the multitudes, I am reminded of the parable of the sower (Mark 4), which Jesus told to illustrate different responses people make to God’s Word. Some people’s hearts are as hard as rock; some are shallow; some are entangled; and some are soft and receptive.

Jesus did not teach this parable to discourage us in evangelism, but to encourage us! As we reflect on the multitudes today, many of whom seem far away from God, we dare not fall into the trap of being a “soil inspector” instead of a “sower.” The Bible is clear: “The sower went out to sow,” and so must we. We are called to be sowers, not soil inspectors. We must not ever say “no” for another person. We are to sow the seed widely, because there is “good soil” out there!

There are individuals and churches all over the country who are reaching people with the Gospel even though others are telling them there are too many obstacles — that it is too difficult. Ultimately there are two types of Christians and churches: 1) those who say, “we can’t reach people today — they’re not interested”; and 2) those who say, “with God’s help, we can and will reach people with the Gospel.” Both groups tend to see the results they expect! Those who say “we can’t,” usually don’t. Those who say, “with God’s help we can,” usually do.

The Mandate
While the religious situation of the multitudes may be continually changing, the mandate has not changed. The Great Commission remains the “marching orders” for the church. We are to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matt 28:18-20).

As we reflect on personal evangelism in the 21st century, we must reaffirm the mandate of sharing the Gospel with every person throughout the whole world. Have you ever reflected on what you cannot do in heaven? You cannot do evangelism in heaven. You can worship in heaven, but you can’t witness. You can fellowship in heaven, but you can’t witness to the lost.

We must recapture a passion for the Great Commission mandate in our day. The early Christians were committed to obeying their obligation to witness. They were ready to share Christ with others at a moment’s notice. They viewed themselves as “tent-making missionaries.”

Let’s take a brief quiz together. What do you call a woman who works in a hospital assisting doctors? Here in America we call her a nurse. But if that nurse gets on an airplane and goes to the Philippines, what is she called? A medical missionary.

Tim Beougher is associate dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth and Graham professor of evangelism and church growth.
right? Do you see the difference in perspective? Why do we not view her (and why does she often not view herself) as a medical missionary here?

Some years ago while visiting a church I overheard a conversation in which a woman was asked what she did for a living. I have never forgotten her reply: “What do I do? I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, on mission for Him, cleverly disguised as an emergency room nurse.” That is the perspective we need to cultivate in our day! What advances we would make in Kingdom work if all believers answered questions about their occupation in this way: “What do I do? I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, on mission for Him, cleverly disguised as a _______.

The early church ministered in a day of great religious pluralism much like our own, but that did not discourage them. On every page in the book of Acts you see the Gospel being shared with others. Our mandate is clear.

The Message

Just like the mandate, the message has not changed. As Paul warns in Galatians 1:8-9, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a Gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a Gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!” The Gospel message has not changed. Persons still need to be told of the person of God, of humankind’s creation and fall, of Christ’s person and work, and of the necessary response of repentance and faith.

As we reflect on where the multitudes are in their spiritual understanding, we see that many people do not have even a basic understanding of who God is. Our context today is more like Acts 17 than Acts 2. So while we should always seek to share all the elements of the Gospel message, we probably need to spend more time in our culture explaining the person of God.

With this conviction as a backdrop, the Billy Graham School of Southern Seminary recently developed a Gospel booklet entitled, “Experiencing God’s Grace.” Using the acrostic G.R.A.C.E. to explain the Gospel (God — Rebellion — Atonement — Conversion — Eternal Life), the booklet begins with a focus on the person of God. Who is God? He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of all things. He is a God of holiness and love. Holiness is that attribute of God that makes Him completely unique and separate from His creation. God is majestic, glorious, and perfect in every way. The slightest sin or imperfection cannot dwell in His holy presence.

It is against this backdrop of God’s holiness that we can clearly see our sin for what it is. Have you ever seen a fireworks display at high noon? Fireworks displays take place at night, because the brilliance of the light is best illuminated against the backdrop of darkness. Likewise, the darkness of our sin is best seen against the backdrop of God’s holiness.

The multitudes know there is something wrong in this world. But most people view their problems in horizontal terms instead of vertical terms. They view their problems through a sociological lens, not a theological one. They don’t understand that their “horizontal” problems with other people stem from their “vertical” problem of sin and estrangement from God.

Some Christian leaders are telling us today that people already know they are sinners — all they need to know is how to be saved. That is simply not true. A lot of people understand something is wrong, but they do not see themselves as guilty sinners under condemnation from a holy God. Most people think they are basically good. They throw out platitudes such as “if God grades on the curve, I’ll make it.” In my own personal evangelism I consistently find that 9 out of 10 lost persons give a “good works” answer to the question of how they believe one enters into a right relationship with God.

Richard Baxter, the great Puritan pastor of the 17th century, offers helpful advice for us as we seek to reach people for Christ in the 21st century. Baxter asks a question that we need to ask today: How shall they call on a Savior until they know they need one? Baxter maintains, “We persuade men to believe that they are sick, that they may go to the Physician.” Baxter shares a powerful illustration about the importance of people understanding sin and condemnation before they can understand grace and the Gospel: “A man on the gallows will be glad of a pardon; but a sinner, by that, thinks he is innocent, would not regard it, but take it for an accusation.”

Imagine a man on the gallows, with a rope around his neck, moments from being hanged to death. A messenger from the king rushes onto the gallows and hands the man a document, declaring, “The king has pardoned you! The king has pardoned you!” Would not that man receive that news gladly and with rejoicing?

But consider if that messenger were to give that same message to a man in the crowd, an “innocent bystander.” How would that man receive the news of a pardon? That man most assuredly would revile the messenger. “What are you doing giving this message to me?” he might angrily ask. “Up there — on the gallows — he’s the guilty party. He’s the one who needs a pardon, not me.” A pardon offered to an “innocent” bystander in the crowd would be considered an insult to him. This illustration points out the wisdom in the oft-quoted statement, “we must first get people lost before we can get them saved.”

The beauty of the Gospel message is that it not only clearly sets forth the problem (our sinfulness in light of God’s holiness), it also sets forth the solution: the cross. Paul summarizes God’s solution to our sin problem in Romans 3:21-26, “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished — He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”

At the heart of the Gospel message is the cross. The cross brings together God as Just and the Justifier. We must emphasize the cross. And we must emphasize the necessity of a per-
sonal relationship with Christ. As I say to people over and over, “It’s not about religion, it’s about relationship.”

The Methods
As we think about methods of personal evangelism in the 21st century, I am reminded of the woman who approached D.L. Moody to criticize his evangelistic approach. She said to him, “I don’t like your method of evangelism!” Moody replied, “I’m not always fond of it myself. What method do you use?” “Oh, I don’t have a method,” she replied. “Well I certainly like my method better than yours!” said Moody.

Far too many people get sidetracked in debates over methodology. Remember that Jesus used three different methods when healing blind men: 1) touch (Matt 9:29); 2) the spoken word (Mark 10:52); and 3) mud (John 9:6). You can imagine these three men arguing over which was the best method of healing — touch, the spoken word, or mud — all the while missing the bigger picture. They had been healed! Today they would probably form 3 new denominations: the Touchites, the Speakites and the Mudites! If you don’t like a particular method of witnessing, don’t spend all your time and energy criticizing it. Find an approach you feel comfortable with and get on with the task.

Personal evangelism must always be personal, “adapted” to the person one is trying to reach and modeled by both walk and talk in the life of the witness. Great patience and perseverance will be required, to travel with persons on what at times may be lengthy spiritual pilgrimages. A helpful analogy may be to consider personal evangelism in the 21st century often looking more like the Emmaus Road than the Damascus Road. Instead of a one-time encounter in which a life is transformed, there may need to be lengthy conversations along the path.

Ultimately, the key issue is the heart of the witness. A person with a passion to communicate will find a way. As Jesus said, “The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart” (Matt 12:34).

The Messengers
We need to recover a Great Commission perspective where every believer accepts his/her responsibility to be involved in witnessing. Studies show that over 90 percent of Christians never have the privilege of leading a lost person to faith in Christ. Corrie ten Boom encourages us to be involved when she writes,

When I enter that beautiful city,
And the saints all around me appear.
I hope that someone will tell me
It was YOU who invited me here.

How do we get there? How can we mobilize an increasing number of workers for the harvest? Ephesians 4:11-13 reminds us that God gives certain individuals as “gifts” to His church, to help train and equip believers for the work of ministry. I would like to suggest that in mobilizing messengers for witness, we focus on five key areas:

1) Knowledge. A person cannot share the Gospel, if he/she doesn’t know it. Training in basic apologetics will help encourage people who are afraid they will be asked a question they can’t answer. As Peter exhorts us, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet 3:15).

2) Skills. We must train laypersons in some basic skills related to witnessing, such as asking good questions and listening. We must provide “on-the-job” training in basic means of communicating the Gospel, such as Gospel booklets and personal testimony.

3) Vision. We must keep before all Christians our responsibility (and privilege) to be communicators of the Good News. What a responsibility and privilege to be an “ambassador for Christ!” (2 Cor 5:20).

4) Character. We must help Christians learn to deal with temptation and lead lives which reflect the holiness of Christ. A believer must not be viewed as a bald-headed man trying to promote hair growth tonic!

5) Power. We must encourage believers to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit for witness. A key verse for witnessing and for living the Christian life in general is 2 Corinthians 4:7: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power must be from God and not from us ourselves.” Jesus told His followers that they would receive power for witness through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

We must mobilize our people not only to witness, but also to pray. Through prayer we see God work in the lives of unbelievers, and in the lives of those of us seeking to share Christ. It is through prayer that we experience being “strong in the Lord and in His mighty power” (Eph 6:10).

The Manner
In closing, let me suggest the manner in which we should approach personal evangelism in the 21st century. We need to display a “loving audacity.” The audacity component means that we do not compromise the truth of the Gospel in our pluralistic society. We must courageously share the words of Jesus in John 14:6, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by Me.”

But our manner must not only display audacity, it must reflect love. We must remember that lost people are not the enemy, they are victims of our true enemy: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). The most loving thing we can do for others is tell them the truth. But we must “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15).

As we reflect on personal evangelism in the 21st century, Jesus’ statement made in the 1st century to His disciples is still true today: “Lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white unto harvest” (John 4:35). Are we looking?

Endnotes
1) Richard Baxter, Catholick Theologie, II (1675), 221.
Going into all the world: A seminary on a mission

When president Albert Mohler created the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth in 1994, the order of the words in the school’s name was significant. Missions is our first priority.

From its inception the Billy Graham School has given priority to fulfilling the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. Our passion as faculty and students is to obey Jesus’ command and make disciples of all the peoples of the world. How have we gone about doing that? This article will provide a 10-year retrospective of the Graham School’s involvement in missions overseas and a preview of future ministries.

Training Missionaries

A priority responsibility for the Graham School is preparing missionaries for service overseas. Most of our graduates serve with the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Graham School offers several different degrees for future missionaries: the master of divinity in missions, the master of arts in missions, and the advanced master of divinity in missions. Beyond that, we offer three different doctoral degrees that afford missionaries the opportunity to enhance their skills and prepare for leadership roles in missions. Those degrees include the doctor of ministry in missions leadership, the doctor of missiology, and the doctor of philosophy degree. Southern Seminary was the first Southern Baptist seminary to offer the Ph.D. in missions and we are the only Southern Baptist seminary that offers the doctor of missiology degree.

Since 1994 the Graham School has offered the master of divinity in international church planting. This degree is often called the “two plus two” program. Students enrolled in this program study two years on campus in Louisville, and then they go overseas to serve for two years with the IMB. Veteran missionaries mentor the students in church planting and mission strategy. While on the field, the students take the classes they need to finish their seminary course work. When they return from their two-year missionary internship, the students receive their degrees and also qualify for career missionary service. During the last ten years our students have served in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Senegal, Russia, India, East Africa, and the Middle East. There are currently more than fifty students enrolled in this program.

Faculty Involvement

The Billy Graham School faculty makes teaching and ministering overseas a high priority. Several of the faculty have spent their sabbatical leaves teaching in seminaries abroad.
Going into a seminary career missionaries, equip students for their service as short-term volunteers and as sending missionaries to the Louisville campus to inform and partake in the East Africa Region under the leadership of John Sapp well as sending professors to teach short-term courses. For its part, the East Africa Region is our first priority.

As the partnership develops, the seminary will send teams of students to do church planting and evangelistic projects as well as sending professors to teach short-term courses. For its part, the East Africa Region under the leadership of John Sapp is providing our students with valuable field experiences as well as sending missionaries to the Louisville campus to inform and equip students for their service as short-term volunteers and as career missionaries.

For example, Dr. James Chancellor has taught at the Philippine Baptist Seminary on his sabbatical, and I taught at the seminary in Ogbomosho, Nigeria. In addition, a number of professors have done short-term teaching in Ghana, Trinidad, Romania, Uganda, Malaysia, Singapore, Ecuador, and Senegal. Moreover, the professors often lead teams of students on mission trips.

**Partnerships**

The Graham School has established several strategic partnerships with Baptist entities overseas. The first of these was our partnership with the Ghana Baptist Convention, which began in 1999. The Graham School sent both professors and students to Ghana to preach, teach, and evangelize. In 2001 a professor and a group of students conducted a course on church planting at the Ghana Baptist Seminary in the mornings and then worked at planting a new church in the afternoons and evenings. In two weeks the team planted a church that drew 150 people to its first worship service. Southern Seminary has also provided library books and a set of computers for the Ghana Baptist Seminary in Kumasi. This partnership will end in 2004.

In 2000 a second partnership was formed with the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary in Penang, Malaysia. The Malaysia seminary sponsors a School of Transcultural Ministry every year in July and August. The Billy Graham School provides a professor each year for this summer institute of missions. In 2002 more than 200 students came from all over Asia to study in Penang. In 2003 students came from China, Burma, Thailand Singapore, South Africa, India, Nepal, Malaysia, and even Alabama. This partnership has been strategic because two-plus-two students from Southern have enrolled in the classes at Penang.

Southern Seminary agreed to form a partnership with the East Africa Region of the IMB in 2003. Through this partnership Southern students will conduct both ethnographic and church growth research in East Africa. The ethnographic research involves studying a given people group (tribe) in order to ascertain their worldview and receptivity to the Gospel. This research enables mission administrators to make informed decisions about assigning personnel to work with those tribes. The church growth research seeks to discover the level of growth in the number of Christians and churches in East Africa. This research is especially helpful in a region where communication is quite difficult. For example, Eric Graf, a doctoral student, and a team of students from the seminary surveyed church planting in the Masai tribe in Kenya to discover whether a church planting movement was occurring within that tribe. Their research demonstrated that while the number of churches was increasing, the movement did not qualify as a church planting movement.

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**Doctoral Students**

The doctoral students in the Billy Graham School have undertaken research that aids the mission board and the cause of Christ around the world. Kuem Ju Lee, a student and a missionary under appointment by the Korean Baptist Convention, is studying how to train illiterate church leaders using the Chronological Bible Storying Method. David Parks, another student, studied the training of indigenous youth leaders in Singapore. James Scroggins, the new dean of Boyce College, completed his dissertation in the Graham School, writing on the need and strategy for missions to youth around the world. Tom B will study exit strategies in East Africa this summer in order to assist missionaries in making a smooth transition from missionary to local leadership.

Doctor of missiology students have performed significant research, also. Joong Shik Kim developed a strategy for planting cell group churches in Bangkok, Thailand. One of his classmates, Prosperly Lyngdoh, wrote on training lay persons to do church planting in India. The first graduate of this program, Duro Ayanrinola, formulated a global missions strategy for the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

The Billy Graham School’s doctoral programs are also training both Americans and internationals to serve as professors of missions for seminaries around the world. For example, Jang Cho is teaching missions in Seoul, Korea, and Duro Ayanrinola is teaching missions at the Nigerian Baptist Seminary.

**Future Innovations**

In response to a request from the IMB, the Billy Graham School is developing a new degree for Bible translators. The master of divinity in missions and Bible translation will be offered for the first time in the fall of 2004. This degree program will equip students to translate the Bible. The IMB has declared this a pressing personnel need because 80 percent of the new people groups they have evangelized do not have the Bible in their language. The new degree is being offered in consortium with the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics in Dallas, Texas, an arm of the Wycliffe Bible Translators. Another new program will provide for rapid training of short-term missionaries serving with the IMB who wish to reenlist as career missionaries.

As always, the Graham School exists to serve the churches and agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention as they seek to fulfill the Great Commission. It is often said that Southern Baptists are a mission people. Southern Seminary and the Billy Graham School exist to help make that statement a living reality.
At first, Norman Chung didn’t know why it happened. After 12 years of service in the United States Army, the Captain and logistician was about to leave the only life he had ever known. Federal law states that any Army officer who is not selected for promotion two times must be released from duty. Chung fell into this category.

“It was not a shock,” said Chung, a current master of divinity student in Southern Seminary’s Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth. “We had been prepared for such an occurrence. It still did not make the experience any more pleasant.”

Now, five years after Uncle Sam issued Chung’s pink slip, Chung finally understands the “why.” God was installing Chung as a soldier in the Kingdom army and as a future missionary to East Asia.

“Fortunately, my family’s faith in the Lord has turned this trial into one of the greatest blessings that I have ever received,” Chung said.

Truth be told, however, Chung’s grooming for the ministry began much earlier in his life. The oldest of three children, Chung was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, to a military officer and a registered nurse. Because of his father’s profession, the family lived in 15 different places, and Chung attended nine different schools. Chung views this lifestyle as God’s providential preparation for missionary work.

“It’s prepared me wonderfully for the mission field,” he said. “Hindsight being 20-20, being able to pack up and go anywhere and not think about it is something that is probably a by-product of that lifestyle.”

Chung made a profession of faith at age 13 at a summer camp. After his decision, however, his faith remained stagnant.

“I grew up in the Army chapel system,” Chung said. “It’s kind of a hit or miss proposition. You have some great pastors and you have some not-so-great pastors. So I was never really discipled as a young Christian. As a result, my faith was very shallow.”
Upon graduation from college, Chung entered the Army as a Second Lieutenant in 1987, serving as a logistician. His assignments sent him all over the world — Germany, Saudi Arabia, Virginia and South Korea — again giving him a worldwide perspective necessary for missions.

During his initial assignment in Germany, he met a fellow logistician — named Deidre — and subsequently fell in love and married in April 1989.

“One of the miracles that the Lord gave me was my wife,” Chung said.

Deidre and Norman have two children — Meghan, 13, born on the day the ground war started in Iraq in 1991, and Zachary, 10.

“These two lives are our greatest treasure,” Chung said.

In their early years of marriage, Chung’s life did not reflect Christ.

“I paid lip service to being a Christian and always thought that there would be a time when I would settle down,” Chung said. “Even during the Gulf War, I never considered trying to come closer to God. Facing possible chemical weapons and SCUD missile attacks did nothing to turn my heart towards God.”

However, in 1993 because of their desire to ensure their children were raised in the church, they began to attend services more frequently.

When they moved to Korea in 1997, they united with a vibrant congregation, and their faith took off.

During this time, Chung attended a retreat. Following that retreat, Chung began to sense a call to the ministry.

“It was at that retreat that I think I really understood for the first time what it meant to be a child of God,” he said.

The leading toward ministry was reinforced when his pastor asked him to consider the ministry shortly after the retreat.

“I said, ‘Okay, I will.’ If he had said two weeks before then, I would have laughed at him.”

When the call was confirmed, the Chungs then began to consider seminaries. One day, Deidre called him while on assignment in another city. She was interested in an available Army assignment in Louisville, Ky., and she asked if Chung had ever considered living there.

“I said, ‘It’s funny that you should mention that. I’ve been on the Internet looking at seminaries, and the flagship seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention is in Louisville,’” Chung recalled.

“So that started us on a long journey of prayer and looking what the options were. And it just seemed like the Lord wanted us in Louisville.”

Thus, the family moved to Louisville in January 2000, and Chung began school that fall.

“God’s called us to the mission field, and we don’t see Him not letting us go.”

“From the moment I set foot on campus, there’s been no doubt in my mind that this is where the Lord wanted us,” Chung said.

In his time at Southern, Chung has had the opportunity to serve the seminary, as well as being served by the seminary.

He worked for two years as a seminary ambassador and currently is assistant director of admissions. Both jobs have reinforced his love for and admiration of the seminary and its faculty.

“The heart the professors have for the local church and the Great Commission has inspired me to want to be out there preaching the Gospel and sharing Christ,” Chung said.

Also during his time at Southern, Chung’s call to ministry has developed. The doors to the chaplaincy closed very quickly for him. Because of the number of years that Chung had spent in the Army, he couldn’t come back as an active duty chaplain.

But a new door soon opened. After hearing a presentation on the International Mission Board at his church — Cedar Creek Baptist — Chung’s heart began to break for the nations.

“The Lord gave me this incredible burden for the nations,” Chung said. “In my Christian life, whenever I absolutely know that the Holy Spirit has fallen upon me, I cry like a baby. …

“And the tears were flowing. My wife Deidre was sitting right next to me and we were holding hands and she was crying. We had never spoken about going to the mission field at all. And she was having the exact same reaction to what we had heard.”

Several months later at a meeting of Southern Seminary’s MissionQuest, a student-led missions organization, Chung developed a more specific passion for East Asia.

“[Since] that point, we’ve been certain that the Lord is calling us to East Asia,” Chung said. “How that’s going to play out in the future, we don’t know.”

The initial plan was to enroll in the 2+2 master of divinity program. But, an IMB representative recommended that he just finish his master of divinity and then go to the field. The advice proved providential.

In July 2002, Chung’s wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. If they had proceeded with the 2+2 program, they probably wouldn’t have found the cancer as soon as they did.

“It reinforced God’s sovereignty in our lives,” Chung said. “God has used that experience to strengthen our walk.”

Deidre has since had the lump removed and has gone through radiation therapy, and the prognosis is good.

The Chung’s still plan to minister in East Asia. The only question now is timing.

“God’s called us to the mission field, and we don’t see Him not letting us go,” Chung said.

But, while they wait, they are not remaining idle. They have already taken one short-term mission trip to East Asia through the seminary, and they will lead another this summer.

They hope one day to serve as strategy coordinators for one of the many unreached cities in East Asia. They hope that day will be soon. If not?

“If not, we may be eligible for the senior program,” Chung quipped.
It should not have come as a surprise when Chuck Lawless won Southern Seminary’s Findley B. and Louvenia Edge Faculty Award for teaching excellence in 2002. He had been passionate about teaching for a long time.

By David Roach

Lawless, who serves as senior associate dean of Southern’s Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth, initially felt the desire to teach when he was five years old. “I fell in love with my kindergarten teacher,” Lawless said, “and I decided then that I wanted to be a teacher.”

During his elementary school years, Lawless’ childhood crush on that teacher developed into a full-blown zeal for academic instruction. Every day after school Lawless would collect unused ditto worksheets and put them in a file to use when he became a teacher. He would still have the file had his wife not asked that it be thrown away when they got married.

The desire to teach persisted through Lawless’ years as a young pastor. In his first church, Lawless gave his deacons tests and recorded the grades in a grade book.

So when Lawless joined the Southern faculty in 1997, “the Lord … fulfilled a dream” for him, he said.

It was not always apparent, however, that Lawless would have the opportunity to fulfill his dream of teaching. For a period of time, Lawless thought he might have to abandon his desire to teach in order to fulfill God’s call to ministry.

Lawless committed his life to Christ in the seventh grade when God used a persistent classmate to tell him about the
Lawless fulfills lifelong dream to teach

Southern Seminary Magazine
Summer 2004

 love of Jesus.

“He was pretty forceful in his approach,” Lawless said. “He would do things like meet me at the classroom door and say, ‘Chuck, it’s a good thing you lived through the night because you’d be in hell right now if you hadn’t.’ ”

“He had very little tact in his approach to evangelism, but he cared about me and loved me enough never to back down. In August of 1974 I became a Christian.”

On day he was converted, Lawless was attending church for the first time in his life. During that same church service, he sensed God calling him to preach.

“I sensed the Lord speaking to me to call me to preach,” Lawless said. “And I had no idea what that meant. All of this was brand new to me. I just got a real strong sense in my heart that God was calling me to preach His Word. I still wanted to teach, but I knew God had called me.”

Lawless continued to sense God’s call to ministry during high school and college. At age 16, he preached for the first time. At 20 while he was a student at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, Lawless began pastoring Mt. Calvary Baptist Church in Harrison, Ohio.

After completing his undergraduate degree at Cumberland College in Williamsburg, Ky., Lawless came to Southern for his master of divinity degree. During his seminary years Lawless pastored Rolling Hills Baptist Church in Fairfield, Ohio. Lawless took eight years to complete his M.Div. through the Monday-only-classes program, but he says serving simultaneously as a pastor and a student provided the ideal balance of academic and practical training.

“I would do it the same way again because I had the privilege of getting ministry experience while also getting some training,” he said. “And I think that’s exactly where it ought to be. If we can help students do practical ministry while they’re getting theological education, we’re getting the best of both worlds.”

Perhaps the most profound experience of Lawless’ seminary career came when two church secretaries convinced him to attend a Christmas party where he met his wife, Pam.

“My church secretary and her church secretary thought we needed to meet one another,” Lawless said. “So they set it up where I would go to a single adult Christmas party at her church.

“But when I got to the party I had forgotten who I was supposed to go meet. So I decided I would just go check out everybody and maybe there would be somebody there I liked. And I saw Pam, and I liked her, and a couple of years later we were married.”

For three years following Lawless’ graduation from seminary, he and Pam devoted themselves to pastoral ministry. But in 1995 the desire to teach led Lawless back to Southern to pursue a Ph.D. in evangelism.

As he worked on his degree, Lawless developed a friendship with the Graham School’s founding dean, Thom Rainer. Eventually, Lawless became Rainer’s student assistant.

“I pretty much did whatever he asked,” Lawless said. “One time I had to feed his bird, and another time I took his dog to the kennel.”

Rainer was a valuable mentor to Lawless because of his combination of theological soundness and evangelistic innovation.

“He [Rainer] is creative,” Lawless said. “He’s cutting edge. In my opinion, he’s America’s premier researcher on the healthy church, on the growing church. And working alongside him challenges me and pushes me to do all the Lord calls me to do.”

In time his relationship with Rainer opened a door for Lawless to fulfill his lifelong dream of teaching.

“He and I just developed a really good relationship, a good working relationship, a good friendship relationship. And I actually taught my first couple of classes here before I finished my Ph.D. work,” he said.

Upon the completion of his Ph.D., the Graham School hired Lawless as assistant professor of evangelism and church growth. In 2002, Lawless became senior associate dean of the Graham School. Last fall he was named William Walker Brookes professor of evangelism and church growth.

According to Lawless, each day at Southern serves as a reminder of God’s goodness in his life.

“I’ve just started my eighth year here, and I’ve yet to have a day where I didn’t want to get up and come to work,” he said. “To work with my colleagues, to work with students who are taking the Gospel to the world, who are stepping out on faith every day of their lives is a constant reminder of God’s gift to me to let me do this work in this place.”

In addition to his duties in the classroom, teaching at Southern has afforded Lawless opportunities to assist churches with evangelism. He regularly preaches in local churches and has served as interim pastor or staff member for several churches over the past decade.

Observing a large number of churches has helped Lawless determine some keys to conducting evangelism successfully in a congregation, he said.

“Evangelism starts with the pastor,” Lawless said. “If the pastor is not doing one-on-one personal evangelism, he will not lead his church to do it either. Every study that we’ve ever done of effective evangelistic churches tells us that pastors of these churches make personal evangelism a priority.”

Effective evangelistic churches also must encourage Christians to make a conscious effort to meet lost people, Lawless said. Too often believers cocoon themselves in a Christian bubble that prevents them from reaching people with the Gospel, he said.

The greatest problem with the evangelistic efforts of most churches, however, is a lack of spiritual commitment by the members, Lawless said.

“I think the biggest issue is we are not committed to and in love with God as we ought to be,” he said. “I am convinced that if we are in love with God and committed to Him and know Him as we ought to know Him, knowing the heart of God will … demand that we reach out to lost people. Good evangelistic training just builds on that desire.”

Lawless does not know exactly how God will use him in the future. But one thing is certain — whatever he does will be accompanied by a zeal for teaching and a burden for lost people.

“Sharing the Gospel is not optional,” he said. “It’s who we are. It’s what we’re supposed to be doing.”

“Evangelism starts with the pastor.”
Southern trustee has balanced approach to ministry

By Jeff Robinson

The day Buddy Gray preached his first sermon at age 16 he did not lose a single member of his congregation.

Perhaps it was because his audience had no place to go.

“The first time I preached was in a jail,” Gray said. “I figured they couldn’t just get up and walk out. They were in the cells and I was on the other side of the bars. I just preached and I assume they listened.”

Today Gray is not preaching to tiny captive audiences but to thousands who willfully attend services at Hunter Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. Gray has pastored the church since 1986.

When Gray first began at Hunter Street, the average weekly attendance hovered around 120. Nearly two decades later, the church has grown into something of a colossus with numerous facilities and more than 4,300 members.

Within three years of Gray’s ascension to the pulpit at Hunter Street, the church grew to such a degree it was forced to relocate to the place where it now resides.

“God has truly blessed this church,” Gray said. “It has been an amazing time because there are such sweet, sweet people here at Hunter Street. I think the people God has brought here have been the key.”

When the church relocated, both attendance and membership began to skyrocket. Gray said he needed something to help him simplify what was rapidly becoming a large ministry.

Gray visited Saddleback Community Church in 1990 pastored by Rick Warren, author of the enormously popular book...
The Purpose Driven Church. Warren’s approach seemed to fit Gray’s vision for Hunter Street, so the church organized around the five purposes that compose Warren’s purpose driven strategy.

“I think a big key to our growth has been a balanced approach to ministry,” Gray said. “We emphasize all aspects of church life the same. A lot of churches are known for their preaching ministry or their missions ministry or even their worship. I guess all that is fine and good, but I like the fact that we’re just balanced in all the areas of the church.

“We have organized around the five purposes that people understand to be purpose driven. That was a real help for me. When I went out to visit with Rick Warren in 1990, he said to do five things instead of 50 and that got my attention. We organized around those five principles and is has been an incredible ride.”

The growth has not been a mere numbers game, says Gray, who served as president of the Alabama Baptist Convention for two terms in 1999-2000.

“The main task of Hunter Street is to present every person complete in Christ,” he said. “That’s my vision for ministry, I guess. Eighty-percent of my job is to lead and feed and to make sure that every person is being equipped to minister wherever God has placed them.”

A present manifestation of this growth in grace is a hunger for biblical and theological truth Gray is witnessing among his members. Each Thursday morning, he meets with a group of members at 5:30 a.m. to discuss theology. The group has been working through Wayne Grudem’s “Systematic Theology.”

Gray is also leading his staff in studying the same book. He is also studying theology with a group of high school seniors.

“I think so often in preaching, people have heard so many sermons, even though they were good and had practical application, they never understood why?” Gray said “They had never understood who God is, what God is all about, why God has done what He has done. I think if you don’t have a theological foundation, the Bible becomes no different than ‘Reader’s Digest.’ It’s just good advice.

“When people understand God’s Word they glorify Him. Then they really do sense that God’s Word is living and the reason they want to [obey God’s Word] is not because they have to, but to glorify Him. I am really sensing that in many, many people here at Hunter Street.”

It is of little surprise that Gray knows the needs of his church for he was anything but a newcomer to Hunter Street when he became its pastor. He served the church as a youth pastor while working on his undergraduate degree at Samford University in 1978. During that time, Gray met his wife, Tricia, who had grown up in Hunter Street.

Gray left the church the first time to attend Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, where he received his master of divinity degree.

“Serving as a trustee here at Southern has been the best thing I have done in denominational life.”

He returned to Hunter Street less than a decade later. The Grays have three children Andrew, 18, Emily 16, Austin, 12.

Gray is a buddy to Southern Seminary. In addition to serving as a member of the board of trustees since 1995, Gray received his D.Min. degree from the school in 2002. This year also marked the end of his second term as chairman of Southern’s board of trustees.

“Serving as a trustee here at Southern has been the best thing I have done in denominational life,” said Gray.

“Just to be around people who are so committed to God’s Word, committed to ministry, committed to the training of ministers, has been a wonderful thing for me.

“The type of students we attract to Southern is very impressive; they are very serious about God’s Word and very serious about the ministry. The young people at the seminary are impressive. The faculty the seminary has attracted is also second to none. It has been amazing to watch God work at Southern.”

God’s work in Gray’s heart began at a fairly young age. Gray’s father was a lifer in the U.S. Army and during his childhood, the family moved about the country and also lived in Germany. At the age of nine, the family settled in Prattville, Ala., the town which Gray considers home.

While his family did not regularly attend church, Gray was saved at age nine after being invited to a Royal Ambassdor’s meeting at a Southern Baptist church by a neighborhood friend. The promise of an opportunity to play one of Gray’s favorite games first lured him to the church.

“I was playing with a little boy and we were shooting marbles and I was winning,” Gray said. “His mother came out and said it was time to go to RAs. I didn’t know what that was and so I asked him. He said, ‘that’s what we do at church.’ I said, ‘yes but what do you all do there [at RAs]’? He said ‘We shoot marbles there.’ I guess that was their outreach program.

“I started walking down the street to go to church there and was saved one Sunday night after I heard the Gospel. I am thankful God saved me when I was young.”

With more than 25 years in ministry, Gray advises budding ministers and seminary students to focus on proclaiming God’s Word and to be active in ministry immediately even while preparing for full-time service. Gray also said ministers must have an obvious and abiding love for their congregations.

“You’ve got to have a commitment to God’s Word,” he said. “You’ve got to believe there is life-changing power in the Gospel. That is the bedrock.

“The next thing is you’ve got to love people. We live in a day in which the message and the messenger are so tied together, if they don’t see that you love them or that you are not genuine, then it doesn’t matter. You’ve got to stand on the Word and love your people. Without those things, there is no ministry.”
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SBC must build on “second chance” for healthy future, Mohler says

The conservative resurgence gave the Southern Baptist Convention a second chance at establishing biblical orthodoxy but did not guarantee the denomination a healthy future, R. Albert Mohler Jr. said in the keynote address at a conference on Baptist identity April 6 at Union University.

Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, addressed the conference theme “Baptist Identity: Is There a Future?” He said the denomination must now take the next step and build upon the conservative resurgence.

“We must understand that the SBC was given in this conservative resurgence a second chance, not a guaranteed future,” Mohler said. “It (the SBC) was not given a continued pass from history nor from the theological debates of the future. Rather, it was given a second chance to establish again a comprehensive, full appropriation of Christian orthodoxy.”

This includes understanding and confessing all the key doctrines that Christians throughout church history have believed, he said. Mohler warned that a fear of doctrine could lead the denomination in the direction of the current mainline denominations, many of which have embraced such ideas as the ordination of homosexuals.

“We live in a day that is allergic to theology and irritated by doctrine,” he said. “If Southern Baptists find themselves irritated by doctrine, we will find ourselves with mainline Protestants, only delayed. Issues (ranging) from open theism to universalism and inclusivism, to the compromise of justification by faith, all these point to the fact that tectonic plates are shifting under the theological landscape.

“Southern Baptists must embrace the challenge of confronting these issues not merely defensively, but rather, as a process of using contemporary debates on present issues to frame a theological reality that is in constant conversation with the apostles, with the (church) fathers, with the reformers, with the evangelicals.”

Another component needed for a healthy future is for the SBC to return to a robust confessionalism, he said. Mohler distinguished between “thin” and “thick” confessionalism.

Southern Seminary President R. Albert Mohler delivered the keynote lecture at Union University’s Baptist Identity conference April 6. Mohler challenged the Southern Baptist Convention to build upon the conservative resurgence which began 25 years ago. photo by Dave Merrifield.

He defined “thin” as a type of confessionalism that views confessing the faith as merely a rote exercise.

Mohler urged Southern Baptists toward a “thick confessionalism” that views confessing truths of Scripture as both a privilege and a matter of accountability.

“Thick (confessionalism) understands it is not merely a requirement, it is a privilege to say, ‘I stand on these truths with this covenant community and as a matter of mutual accountability before God and under the authority of Scripture we join together to hold ourselves accountable to the regulative function of a confession of faith that points us, as a matter of accountability, to our responsibility in this age to confess the faith in a way that is in a constant conversation with those who have come before,’” Mohler said.

Mohler said a recovery of Baptist principles is also needed. Southern Baptists must return to the historic Baptist understanding of the church that is built upon an uncompromising commitment to regenerate church membership and believer’s baptism.

Southern Baptists must also rediscover what Mohler called “the discipline of theological triage.” Like doctors in an emergency room, Southern Baptists must direct their energy toward issues that are most critical and faith-threatening, he said.

“First order” issues — those that separate Christians from non-Christians such as belief in the bodily resurrection of Christ — are the most critical and must receive immediate attention, Mohler said.

He said “second order” issues such as infant baptism vs. believer’s baptism are important and will separate Christians along denominational lines but are to be treated as debates among believers.

“Third order” issues are disagreements on peripheral matters such as the timing of the millennium. They should lead to discussion, not division, Mohler said.

Southern Baptists must devote more attention to first order issues than third, though the reverse is often true, Mohler said. By Jeff Robinson
Seminary trustees affirm new Intercultural Studies program

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary’s board of trustees April 20 unanimously affirmed an initiative that creates a new Intercultural Studies program aimed at fulfilling the Great Commission.

Seminary President R. Albert Mohler Jr. appointed Ken Fentress as dean of the new program. While new courses will eventually be added as part of the program, Fentress’s immediate task will be to analyze existing seminary courses to ensure that they meet the cultural diversity purpose demanded by the Great Commission,” Mohler said.

Referring to Revelation 7:9, Mohler said God’s glory is magnified when the church ministers to the redeemed from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. This is a vital part of the seminary’s task in preparing ministers to the glory of God, he said.

“We’ve been working hard in the curriculum to make sure that in every single course — whether it is missions and evangelism or theology or Old Testament exegetics — we understand the Great Commission horizon of this course,” Mohler said.

“We must ask how we understand, through every course, through every program of study, through every emphasis, what it would mean for God to find glory in the sameness of human beings made in His image and Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb and in the diversity of human beings … and bring them all under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.”

Mohler said Fentress was clearly the man God had sent to Southern to lead the new program.

“This is a big step for us,” Mohler said. “We’ve been looking for an individual whom God has gifted to have the leadership qualities to take on this kind of challenge. He is also going to bring a vision to us that is going to help us to see God’s glory demonstrated, we hope not only in the age to come, but we’re determined to see it in the churches of our denomination looking to the future.”

“Ken Fentress is one of the most intellectually and academically qualified young scholars in America. He is also one of the most equipped leaders of this generation. He has served as a pastor and he is a man who is going to bring enormous passion to this. We have prayed him to Southern Seminary.”

Fentress presently serves as assistant professor of Old Testament interpretation at Southern, a position he has held since 2003. He is a former pastor who holds degrees from Criswell College, Southern Seminary and Johns Hopkins University.

Fentress says he hopes to develop leaders who will be able to minister in the culturally and racially diverse church of the 21st century.

“It is a great honor and a humbling experience to have the opportunity to serve as dean of Intercultural Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,” said Fentress, who will also serve on Southern Seminary’s Executive Cabinet.

“My vision for the new deanship is to seek to develop a new generation of racially diverse leaders who will be prepared to meet the challenges of 21st Century Christian ministry with a biblical based, well-informed evangelical theological perspective that will advance the Kingdom of God and the Church of Jesus Christ.”

Fentress says the initiative is a “definitive step toward faithfully fulfilling the New Testament vision of racial reconciliation” as demanded by the Great Commission.

“It is vital to work toward racial reconciliation because it is consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ through which God reconciles people of all races to Himself,” Fentress said.

“Reconciliation with God through Christ is the basis for racial reconciliation in the Church [according to] 1 John 1:7.”

Russell D. Moore, dean of the School of Theology and senior vice president for academic administration at Southern, called the initiative “an historic moment” in Southern Baptist history that recognizes Southern Baptists are no longer a racially homogenous, regional denomination.

“But this initiative is about more than the challenging demographics of Southern Baptist churches,” Moore said. “It is rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a Gospel that transforms churches, breaking down barriers of racial pride or ethnic boundary.”

In other business, trustees:

• Elected and extended tenure to a number of faculty members: Chad Brand, associate professor of Christian theology; Gary Bredfeldt, professor of Christian leadership and Ministry; William R. Cutrer, C. Edwin Gheens professor of Christian ministry; Russell T. Fuller, associate professor of Old Testament interpretation, and Eric L. Johnson, associate professor of pastoral theology. Bredfeldt will begin service on Southern’s faculty in the fall. He is presently professor of Department of Educational Ministries at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Ill.

• Promoted several faculty members from associate to full-professor status: Douglas C. Walker III, professor of Christian ministry; William F. Cook, professor of New Testament interpretation; Esther R. Crookshank; professor of church music; Peter J. Gentry, professor of Old Testament interpretation; Gregory A. Wills, professor of church history; and Charles E. Lawless, Jr., professor of evangelism and church growth. Trustees also honored Walker for his 10 years of service as the seminary’s senior vice president for Institutional Relations. “He (Walker) has helped so many Christians to exercise stewardship,” Mohler said. “We express a profound gratitude for his work.”

• Approved a $26.9 million budget for the 2004-05 fiscal year, a 5.2 percent increase over last year.

By Jeff Robinson
The pilgrimage of Ken Fentress is proof that God’s providence is often seen most clearly in retrospect.

Fentress, dean of a new Intercultural Studies program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, says God was fitting him for his latest task even before his birth in 1963.

Born to a teenage mother unable to care for the needs of an infant, Fentress was legally adopted and raised by his maternal grandfather, a man he would soon come to call “daddy.”

His grandfather was born in 1893, barely a half generation after the United States had been torn asunder by war and slavery, a scant few years after Reconstruction sought to put the pieces together again. “Daddy” fought for his country in World War I and witnessed the pieces together again. “Daddy” fought for his country in World War I and witnessed the massive historic turning points such as World War II, the Cold War and the struggle for Civil Rights.

Though the hardscrabble world in which his grandfather lived did not always exist in harmony, Fentress said the rich history through which “daddy” lived taught him the critical nature of selfless love.

For Fentress, the elder has served as a living parable for the younger, proclaiming a lesson central to the Christian faith, a lesson critical nature of selfless love.

The twin truths of the exclusivity of Jesus and its doctrine of Holy War. For SBJT examine the religion’s view of Islam of that moribund day, Christians have become increasingly aware of the spread of Islam across the globe. The Spring 2004 edition of The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology focuses on “The Challenge of Islam.” The journal focuses on Christian preaching and leadership.

By Jeff Robinson
Ed Stucky planned to read during a recent plane ride from Orlando to Louisville.

But when fellow passengers began asking questions about the Bible, the Southern Seminary student from Townsend, Tenn., found himself standing in the aisle and sharing the Gospel with more than 70 people.

Stucky began the flight reading Bible commentaries in preparation for an upcoming sermon. When a fellow passenger remarked that she was taking a New Testament class in college, however, Stucky initiated a conversation that would develop into an opportunity to tell half of the airplane about salvation in Christ.

 Upon hearing about the young college student’s study of the Bible, Stucky asked whether she had a personal interest in knowing the Scriptures.

“We talked a little about the Bible, and I [said] that I not only believed that the Bible was great literature but that it was the inerrant Word of God,” Stucky said. “Everything in it was written for God to reveal Himself to us, and we should have more than just a casual interest in it because it holds answers to all of life’s problems and questions.”

As Stucky talked about the Bible, four additional people began listening to the conversation. Within minutes, a man across the aisle asked if he could listen, and Stucky’s audience totaled 11 people.

When a passenger commented that he prayed regularly but did not have a clear picture of God’s character, Stucky explained how God reveals Himself through the Bible.

“Everybody seemed to be really interested in what I was saying,” he said. “By the time I got done with [the subject of] God’s revelation, there were three people standing in the aisle listening. I thought, This is too much. Now I’ve got 15 people that I know are engaged in the conversation.”

Within minutes, Stucky was forced to stand in the aisle due to the large number of people who wanted to hear his remarks. When a woman one row behind him asked, “wasn’t Jesus just a good teacher? Aren’t there many ways to God?” Stucky began explaining that Jesus provides the only way of salvation.

“It was the perfect opportunity,” Stucky said. I said, “Jesus said that He was the Way, the Truth and the Life and no one comes to the Father except through Him. So He couldn’t have just been a good teacher.”

Stucky continued, citing an argument from C.S. Lewis, “[Jesus] either had to be a liar, a lunatic or Lord. And those are the only three options that work. He either had to be crazy and totally deceived and thought He was the Son of God. Or He had to be a liar, and He knew He wasn’t and He just mis-portrayed Himself. Or He had to be Lord. He can’t be a combination of those things.”

As Stucky spoke about Christ, other passengers began to listen and one asked what

Stucky thought about Mel Gibson’s ‘Passion’ movie.

“I said, ‘I haven’t seen it myself,’ Stucky said. ‘I’ve heard a lot about it, and I think it reinforces the fact that America is searching for something real.”

“When I think about the God of the universe coming to this world to die to pay for my sins, a death that I couldn’t pay, it moves me because I have a relationship with God. We can’t pay for the sins that we commit. We are all born sinful, yet God requires death for that sin. So to provide a way for us to have a relationship with Him, He sent His Son to die.’

As Stucky finished explaining the Gospel, the plane started its final decent into Louisville. Stucky took his seat and realized that more than 70 people had been listening to him.

“The last thing that happened before I got off the plane was that the young lady that was sitting beside me said that she would find her way to church the next morning, which was Sunday morning,” Stucky said.

He was surprised that he was able to stand and speak for so long without being told to stop.

“I attribute it to the grace of God, and I was amazed not only that I was allowed to stand up in the plane that long but also by the way God ordered the questions to facilitate the Gospel presentation,” Stucky said.

This unique evangelistic encounter reminded Stucky that people are searching for spiritual answers, he said.

“If cogent, clear arguments are put forth, people are willing to listen,” Stucky said. “People really are looking for answers, and we’ve got them and we’ve got to get them out. We can speak with confidence and know that people are searching.”

By David Roach

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Conference focuses on Great Commission prayer

Christians must make prayer a priority if they hope to fight the powers of darkness and make an impact for Christ, according to speakers at the first annual Great Commission Prayer Conference March 19-20 at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The conference, sponsored jointly by the North American Mission Board, the Kentucky Baptist Convention (KBC) and Southern Seminary, focused on the theme, “A Great Commission Prayer Conference … Invading the Kingdom of Darkness on our Knees.” The conference included 180 participants from across Kentucky and Indiana.

“The goals of this conference were threefold: to educate pastors, prayer leaders and laypersons in issues relating to prayer, to encourage those who lead prayer in their churches, associations and state conventions and to aid prayer leaders in building networks through fellowship,” said Eric Allen, director of the Prayer Strategies Office of the KBC and conference co-coordinator.

Conference attendees listened to plenary addresses by Bill Mackey, executive director of the KBC; John Avant, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Ga.; and Chuck Lawless, senior associate dean of Southern’s Billy Graham School of Missions Evangelism and Church Growth.

The conference also included 18 workshops taught by seminary faculty and other leaders from around the United States. Worship was led by teams from several Louisville-area churches.

Preaching from Ephesians 6, Lawless told participants that Christians must pray with persistence in order to maximize the power of prayer in their ministries.

“This battle is real, and we need prayer warriors,” said Chuck Lawless, professor of evangelism and church growth at Southern Seminary, during the first annual Great Commission Prayer Conference. photo by Dave Merrifield.

“Preaching from Ephesians 6, Lawless told participants that Christians must pray with persistence in order to maximize the power of prayer in their ministries. “You are in a battle,” he said. “You are trying to take the Gospel of light into the kingdom of darkness. You are being used of God to rescue people who are held in the bondage of sin, and this battle is intense. This battle is real, and we need prayer warriors who simply do not give up in the task.”

The task of prayer can be grueling, Lawless said. But Christians must continue to pray because of prayer’s power to affect missions and evangelism, he said.

“You must pray even when the battle hurts. And you must pray on even when it seems like you are praying by yourself. And you must pray on even when the results seem few. You cannot give up in the battle,” Lawless said.

“We have an obligation to pray for all our missionaries today who are on the frontlines, taking the Gospel into the darkness. Our task is significant. We need to be praying for missionaries.”

Response to the conference has been overwhelmingly positive, said John Ewart, associate vice president for distance education and innovative learning at Southern and conference co-coordinator. In fact, the success of this year’s conference has encouraged leaders to begin planning for next year.

“We have already started planning for next year’s conference in partnership with the Kentucky Baptist Convention,” Ewart said. By David Roach

More than 174 students received degrees during Southern Seminary’s 193rd graduation on May 14. In his commencement address from James 1, seminary President R. Albert Mohler Jr. urged graduates to be doers of God’s Word as well as ministers of the Word. In a separate ceremony, Boyce College graduated a record 95 students. Daniel L. Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., delivered the commencement address for Boyce, Southern’s undergraduate school.
Seminarians share Christ with hundreds at ‘Reaching Out 2004’

More than half a million Louisville residents saw Thunder Over Louisville as an opportunity to view an air show and fireworks display along the banks of the Ohio River.

But a group of students and faculty at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary saw the April 17 event as an opportunity to share the message of Christ with hundreds of lost neighbors.

Students and faculty took part in Reaching Out 2004, a Saturday morning event in which teams from Southern shared the Gospel at strategic sites throughout Louisville. The teams witnessed to several hundred people in three different languages — Korean, Spanish and English.

“I know that God has touched many hearts and that we will see fruit from that,” said Twyla Fagan, director of Great Commission ministries at Southern. “His Word does not return void. So we are very thankful for what He is doing to and what He has done in our own hearts as well.”

J.D. Payne, associate professor of evangelism and church planting, was part of the team that shared the Gospel with attendees at Thunder Over Louisville.

“Everyone we talked to was very open to talking about the Gospel,” Payne said. “We had people asking questions, asking tough questions. We were praying with people down there, leaving tracts behind and leaving cards behind.”

One young man named Brian asked Payne a series of probing questions about Christ.

“He was really seeking,” Payne said. “He said, ‘I’m just really struggling over whether Jesus is the only way.’ He was so honest and so open, dialoguing and wanting to know the truth. I challenged him in his prayers to pray that God would reveal Himself to him. I left a tract behind and prayed for him.”

Matthew Cooke, a master of divinity student from Maynardville, Tenn., shared the Gospel with a woman who had battled a drug addiction for 20 years. At first, the woman was unreceptive to Cooke. But after he listened to her speak about her life struggles, the woman allowed Cooke to talk about Christ.

“After I listened to her problems for a while and really cared and was compassionate, she started telling me the truth,” Cooke said. “A lot of times people will tell you things to get you out of their face. But the more you minister to people in their entirety, the more they will be willing to let you minister to them in the spiritual realm.”

Reaching Out 2004 gave Matthew Levant, a master of divinity student from Laredo, Texas, an opportunity to see spiritual warfare taking place firsthand. While conducting door-to-door evangelism with a Hispanic church plant, Levant encountered Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons canvassing the same neighborhood.

“There was just evident spiritual warfare,” he said.

By David Roach

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Conservative resurgence was about theology, not politics, SBTS panel says

Theology, not politics, was the fuel that fired the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention, members of a panel at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary asserted during a 25th anniversary commemoration of the resurgence on April 13.

While opponents of the resurgence argued that politics drove the conservative cause, it was theological issues in general, and the inerrancy of Scripture in particular, that animated conservative concerns, panelists said.

The panel consisted of Southern Seminary President R. Albert Mohler Jr., Union University President David Dockery, Russell D. Moore, dean of Southern’s School of Theology and senior vice president for academic administration, and Gregory A. Wills, associate professor of church history at Southern. Wills also serves as director of the Center for the Study of the SBC, the symposium sponsor.

“In the beginning, in the middle, and in the end, the controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention was about theology,” Mohler said. “… Even when those who denied it was theological made their arguments most vociferously, they did so in theological terms.

“Undergirding every assertion, not only not in the closet, but standing out in the forefront, of every debate was theology. It is inescapably so because theology is the most fundamental issue of our knowledge, of our truth claims, of our thinking. It is the establishment of our worldview. … Theology is the essence of the church.”

The SBC and its seminaries held to the inerrancy of Scripture without debate until the dawn of the 20th century, he said. This began to change in the first half of the century when Enlightenment ideology began to exert an influence on the denomination’s seminaries, Mohler said.

Enlightenment philosophy questioned the inspiration, inerrancy and authority of the Bible. Once these views took hold in the seminaries, the resurgence was necessary, he said.

“For the first time Enlightenment ideologies and philosophies as a challenge to revelation itself came to southern shores, to southern states and into the bosom of the Southern Baptist Convention, Mohler said.

“If you accept the fundamental naturalistic and secular assumptions of the Enlightenment, then you can no longer think of Scripture as the revealed Word of God, the Word of God written.

“Instead, you see the Scripture as eloquent, articulate, moving and even consensually important documents that reflect how human beings have apprehended the divine reality. But you can no longer say ‘as Scripture speaks, God speaks.’”

Dockery pointed to the influence of pragmatism and naturalistic methods of biblical criticism on SBC schools in the middle of the 20th century. These drew the denomination away from its historic view of Scripture, he said.

“When the controversy began in 1979, one of the first responses … was that people began to proclaim … that inerrancy has never been a part of our Baptist heritage,” he said. “Yet a further reflection shows that not to be the case.”

Dating back to Southern Seminary founders James Boyce and Basil Manly, Southern Baptists have defended the inerrancy of the Bible, Dockery said. Southwestern Baptist

David Dockery, president of Union University in Jackson, Tenn., addressed seminary students during a recent celebration of the 25th anniversary of the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention. photo by Dave Merrifield.

Theological Seminary founder B.H. Carroll exemplified the historic Baptist view of Scripture when he said that it “is logically impossible for the so-called truth of science or philosophy to conflict or contradict … the truth of the Bible,” Dockery said.

In the 1950s, however, many Southern Baptists began to emphasize programs at the expense of theological depth, he said. This move away from doctrinal emphases provided fertile ground for theological moderates to attack the doctrine of inerrancy, Dockery said.

“That’s when the controversy surrounding the nature of Scripture entered the public arena,” he said. “A theological understanding was lacking to examine and evaluate such issues. Even men and women who never questioned the reliability of the biblical message … were confused by terms like ‘inerrant’ and ‘infallibility,’ which had been employed in previous generations.”

The 1960s and 1970s saw a series of battles between moderates and conservatives over the nature of Scripture, Dockery said. Moderates produced such works as “The Message of Genesis” by Ralph Elliot while conservatives responded with books like W.A. Criswell’s “Why I Preach that the Bible is Literally True.”

As conservatives gained control of the denomination over the subsequent decades, inerrancy emerged as the dominant position among Southern Baptists, returning the convention to its historic roots, he said.

If Southern Baptists wish to minister effectively in the coming years, they must continue to defend inerrancy, Dockery said.

“Southern Baptists cannot give up the affirmation of a totally true and trustworthy Bible because this foundational commitment serves all other essential affirmations of the Christian faith,” he said.

While some erroneously argue that the resurgence was driven by a desire to “save America” through battling liberalism on issues such as abortion, homosexuality, Moore said the SBC must not turn the resurgence into a movement that views political and social issues apart from Scripture.

“There are real warnings that we must understand,” Moore said. “The intuitionism that Southern Baptists have expressed in the cultural arena must rest on a theology — a theology of biblical authority, of conversion, of confessional integrity.

“We cannot be left on the fumes of a previous understanding of Scripture and of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Where you do not have a bold and robust theology informing Great Commission passion, then so often, all you have left is politics. All you have left is a church that is indeed malleable by the culture … Where there is no theological identity, there is a danger of becoming a constituency group.

Wills said the conservative resurgence produced two distinct groups of Baptists — each claiming to be the heir to authentic Baptist tradition.

Conservatives claim that Baptist tradition most fundamentally includes a commitment to correct doctrine while moderates argue that Baptist tradition is based upon a commitment to freedom, he said.

Careful examination of Baptist history, however, reveals that commitment to right doctrine most accurately represents “the authentic Baptist tradition,” Wills said.

By David Roach and Jeff Robinson
Uganda mission trip kicks off Southern Seminary-Eastern Africa Partnership

Four faculty members from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary recently took the inaugural mission trip in Southern’s three-year partnership with the Eastern Africa Region of the International Mission Board.

The group traveled to Kampala, Uganda March 31-April 8 where they led conferences for pastors and their wives, conducted door-to-door evangelism, preached in local Baptist churches and spoke to a group of more than 3,000 university students.

The team from Southern, which worked in conjunction with IMB missionaries in Eastern Africa, included Thorn Rainer, dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth; Chuck Lawless, senior associate dean of the Graham School; John Ewart, associate vice president for distance education and innovative learning; and Twyla Fagan, director of Great Commission ministries.

“This initial trip demonstrated to me the great receptivity to the Gospel in the world, even in some of the heavily-populated Muslim areas,” Rainer said. “I look forward to continuing this partnership, and particularly to returning to Uganda. There is so much more work that remains to be done.

One of the most significant parts of the trip was seeing the Ugandan people respond to the Gospel, Lawless said. People in several villages committed their lives to Christ in response to the team’s evangelism, he said. The spouses of Rainer, Lawless and Ewart made the trip and participated in the work.

“My wife and I began sharing the Gospel in a village, and the Ugandans quickly gathered their friends to listen,” Lawless said. “An 85-year-old Muslim invited us into his home and graciously listened to the story of Christ. A man walking through the streets heard the story and chose to follow Christ.

“Young people today know that the Bible is real, and the stories of Jesus are coming true,” Lawless said. “This is the day in which we know the Word impacts the day-to-day processes of their lives.

For Fagan, the trip demonstrated the hunger people in Uganda feel for God’s Word.

“The pastors and pastors wives conferences were a wonderful experience,” Fagan said. “It was obvious that there is a great hunger for biblically-based evangelism, spiritual warfare and church growth in the greater evangelical community of Kampala. Church leaders came from many different denominations, and their desire to know how God’s Word impacts the day-to-day processes of their local ministries was significant.”

Rainer, Lawless and Fagan said that working with IMB missionaries was an inspiring reminder of the impact that fully committed Christians can have for the kingdom of God.

With the Uganda mission trip recently completed, the Southern Seminary-Eastern Africa Partnership is gearing up for the upcoming summer mission trips. Three teams of faculty and students will travel to Kenya, Tanzania and Southern Sudan May 17-31.

The trips to Kenya, Tanzania and Southern Sudan will occur as a part of Southern’s partnership with the Eastern Africa region of the International Mission Board. The Southern Sudan team will face temperatures in excess of 120 degrees Fahrenheit as they do evangelism in cities and remote villages.

The teams traveling to Ecuador and East Asia will participate in evangelistic campaigns and teach chronological Bible stories, a method of evangelism that explains redemptive history to people unfamiliar with the Christian worldview.

“These trips are an opportunity for our students actually doing missions while they’re here on our campus, and for the leaders of Southern’s Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth.”

In fact, my prayer is that God would provide enough funding that we could actually require our students to take an international missions trip as part of their training here. Our faculty who lead these trips will also be more sensitive to connecting their own disciplines and classes to fulfilling the Great Commission,” he said.

Professors scheduled to lead the trips include David Sills, associate professor of Christian missions and cultural anthropology; George Martin, M. Theron Rankin Professor of Christian Missions; Daniel Hatfield, vice president for Student Services; Larry Purcell, professor of Leadership and Church ministry; Timothy Beougher, Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism and Church Growth; and Brad Waggoner, dean of the School of Leadership and Church Ministry.

Southern will continue its Eastern Africa partnership this summer by sending three teams of faculty and students to Africa. All three teams will travel May 17-31. One will travel to Kenya, another to Tanzania and the third to Southern Sudan.

By David Roach
Nine missionaries with ties to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have been appointed to serve in Pennsylvania by the North American Mission Board.

Robert S. “Steve” and Jennifer Canter serve in the United States or Canada. Steve Canter is a church planting missionary. The Canter’s were appointed under the US/C-2 program, in which young adults complete two years of missions service in the United States or Canada.

Canter, who considers Fairfield, Ohio, his hometown, is a graduate of Cumberland College in Williamsburg, Ky., and is attending Southern Seminary. He has served as pastor of Graceland Community Church in Fairfield and On Missions Director for Southwestern Baptist Association in Hamilton since April of last year. Earlier he served as minister of students and discipleship training for Rolling Hills Baptist Church in Fairfield and as youth pastor for Fairlawn Baptist Church in Dunbar, WVa.

Jennifer Canter, a West Virginia native, is a graduate of Cumberland College and West Virginia State College, holding bachelor’s degrees in political science and education. She currently is a self-employed childcare provider, and has earlier experience as a grant coordinator, receptionist, and director of Appalachian Ministries in Williamsburg, Ky.

The Canter’s have two daughters: Katherine, 4, and Madison, 3.

Theological College and Southern Seminary. He previously has served in youth ministry positions with churches in Louisville, Ky.; Thomasville, Ga.; Naples, Fla., and at his home church, First Baptist Church of Per- rine in Miami.

Jaime, a Florida native, is a graduate of Florida Baptist Theological College and attended Southern Seminary. She has worked as a secretary, summer youth intern, Christian school teacher, preschool teacher and summer missionary.

The Delfosses have one son, John, who was 2 in May.

Kevin and Zandra E. “Sandy” Marsico serve in Frederick, Md., where Kevin Marsico is a church planting consultant/specialist for the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware and pastor of NorthStar in nearby Monrovia.

Marsico, who grew up in Owings, Md., is a graduate of Columbia International University and Southern Seminary. He previously served as youth church plant pastor for Montrose Baptist Church in Rockville, Md., and youth pastor of Catonsville Baptist Church in Baltimore.

Sandy, also a Maryland native, is a graduate of Prince Georges Community College in Largo. She has been an emergency room nurse since 1996.

The Marsicos have two sons, Joshua, 6, and Nicholas, 4.

Todd A. Martin serves in Lexington, Ky., where he is a student evangelism specialist working with international students on the campus of the University of Kentucky. He was appointed under the US/C-2 program, in which young adults complete two years of missions service in the United States or Canada.

Martin, who considers Longwood, Fla., his hometown, is a graduate of the University of Florida and is currently attending Southern Seminary. He previously served as an intern youth minister in Fort Collins, Colo., and also served two years as a Journeyman missionary for the International Mission Board in Ivanofrankivsk, Ukraine.

James W. “Jim” and Jennifer K. Ramsey serve in Howell, Mich., where James Ramsey is a Nehe- miah Project church planter.

Ramsey, who grew up in DeSoto, Mo., is a graduate of Missouri Baptist College and Southern Seminary. He has served as a college ministry intern for West County Community Church in Wildwood, Mo. Prior to attending seminary he served as a U.S. Army infantryman and as a military police- man with the Missouri National Guard. He also has worked as a staff aide for Community Treatment Inc. in DeSoto, Mo., and as a caseworker for the Missouri Department of Social Services.

Jennifer also grew up in Missouri and is a graduate of Missouri Baptist College. She previously was a schoolteacher in Louisville, Ky., and also has been an M-fuge ministry track leader and summer missionary in Kansas City, Mo.

The Ramseys have one daughter, Julia, 1.

Jean-Feder and Lamerce St. Juste serve in Louisville, Ky, where Jean-Feder St. Juste is a Nehemiah Project church planter serving as pastor of a Haitian congregation.

St. Juste, a native of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, is a graduate of Boyce Bible College, Jefferson Community College in Louiv- isville and Southern Seminary. He previously has worked with United Parcel Service and as a chauffeur. He also has served as a church administrator and president of a discipleship ministry in Haiti, and preacher, teacher, and director of Christian education for First Haitian Baptist Church of Louisville.

Lamerce, also a native of Haiti, is a gradu- ate of Jefferson Community College in Louiv- isville. She has worked as a nursing assistant, babysitter, day care worker and bus driver. She also has served churches as a director of children’s ministry, and Sunday school teacher.

The St. Juste’s have one daughter, Christiana, 2.

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Jewell Davis believes that giving to Southern Seminary is among the most exciting ministries a person can have.

And Davis knows something about exciting ministries. He has planted churches in China and India, taught a Sunday school class with more than 40 members and ministered to countless people in crisis through his job as a physician.

One of Southern’s most noteworthy features is its potential to make a long-range impact upon thousands of people, the Lubbock, Texas resident said.

“I studied the history of the institution and the great theology reaching all the way back to the Reformation, and I felt like as far as making a long-range impact, being affiliated with an institution that turns out 300 preachers a year for 30 years would make a tremendous impact,” he said.

Davis was introduced to the seminary by childhood friend Robert Jeffress when Jeffress served on the Southern Baptist Convention’s committee on nominations. Though Davis knew very little about Southern, he allowed Jeffress to nominate him to serve on Southern’s board of trustees in 1995.

“He (Jeffress) called and said, ‘Jewell, I know you like theology. How would you like to be a trustee at Southern Seminary?’” Davis said. “I didn’t even know where Southern Seminary was, but my first meeting was that next year.”

Over the past eight years, however, Davis has more than made up for his initial lack of knowledge about Southern. Through visiting the seminary campus twice each year for trustee meetings, he has gained great respect for the academic and ministerial excellence of Southern’s faculty.

“Top to bottom you’re dealing with quality when you’re talking about these departments and people that fill the teaching slots,” he said. “I’ve found that theologians at Southern … interact with people in times of crisis, at times of change, at big watershed moments in history. And I’ve found that these professors have had practical missions experience, church experience, and they’ve been very practically prepared by the Lord so they’re not just teaching theory. They’re teaching practice.”

In addition to his service at Southern, Davis demonstrates his commitment to practical ministry by serving on the board of Asian Partners International, an organization that plants churches in countries that are closed to Christianity. Since 1993 Asian Partners International has planted thousands of house churches in areas previously closed to the Gospel.

Through Asian Partners International Davis has accompanied itinerate evangelists into previously unreached villages on several occasions. One of Davis’ trips took him to an area of northern India where it is illegal to be a Christian.

“The Hindu government in this area of northern India is very antagonistic toward proselytizing. In fact, it’s illegal to become a Christian. It’s illegal to proselytize, and Christians are persecuted and killed. There are usually persecutions and murders every year,” he said.

“We have to fly under the radar. You don’t ever announce that you’re a Christian,” Davis said.

In addition to his overseas ministry opportunities, Davis participates in a number of ministries in his home church, First Baptist Church of Lubbock. He teaches a Sunday school class with more than 40 regular attendees and serves on the missions committee.

Despite his numerous commitments at church, Asian Partners International and work, Davis makes it a point to stay involved in the ministry of Southern Seminary. When he rotates off the board of trustees, Davis plans to serve on the Southern Seminary Foundation board of directors.

As Southern grows, the seminary must have donors who will help fund the expansion of programs and facilities, Davis said.

“I would love to see double the number of students there, but we just don’t have the infrastructure for it,” he said. “But as long as we can keep our quality, I’d like to see us keep growing.”

Davis concluded, “I look forward to having a continuing relationship with Southern Seminary.”

By David Roach
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People and Places

Southern Seminary has a rich history of alumni serving Christ throughout the world. The intent of this section is to help the seminary family stay close — whether that be through the news of a new ministry position, a retirement, a birth or a death. To submit information to People and Places, call 502-897-4143 or e-mail irprojects@sbts.edu.

40s
Ray Y. Langley (‘44) is currently active, though now a “senior” citizen, through an e-mail ministry that sends Bible verses, notes, and messages to 170 people each week.

50s
Bob J. Neil (‘56) married Currie Campbell on Nov. 29, 2003. They are both retired choral directors and college professors and make their home in Montreat, N.C.

60s
Robert E. Lee Trail (‘65), pastor of Cheriton Baptist Church, has been in full-time ministry for the past 45 years, 12 of which have been at Cheriton Baptist Church. He will be retiring in June 2004, but will continue to do supply preaching, missions, and church work. H. William Perry (‘66) will retire as pastor of First Baptist Church (FBC) of Statesboro, Ga., where he has served since 1981.

70s
Tom Atwood (‘73) retired as pastor from FBC Oxford, Miss., due to health concerns. He has served in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia and is also a former trustee for Southern Seminary. He currently lives in Oxford where he continues a preaching, mentoring, and writing ministry.

Larry J. Michael (‘78) has accepted the senior pastorate at FBC Sweetwater, Longwood, Fla. He began in January. He has also recently authored *Spurgeon on Leadership*, released by Kregel Publications. Steve Smith (‘79) founded *The Potter’s Inn Ministry* devoted to the work of spiritual formation. The ministry is out of Colorado Springs, Colo. Contact www.pottersinn.com for more information.

John E. Hurtgen (‘85) has been serving as interim dean for the school of theology at Campbellsville University since September, 2003.

D. Adegboyega Adeniran (‘90) is serving as the dean of the faculty of theology at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary. Colin Redekop (‘99) has been called as director of worship and music at Portage Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

2000s
Scott Cassidy (‘03) has been serving at Auburn Baptist Church since January.

Missions
Norman L. Harrell and his wife have retired from the IMB and returned from Portugal where they were doing general evangelism as well as church and home outreach evangelism. Larry Moxley and his wife, Susan, have recently returned from a mission trip to Kosovo. Previous mission efforts include Peru, India, Kenya, and El Salvador.

Births
John Borengasser (‘03) and his wife, Diana, announce the arrival of their daughter, Sarah Diana. She was born on Dec. 27, 2003 in Louisville. She joins her siblings Lydia, Stephen, James, Rachel, and Anna.

DEATHS
Mary Virginia Bean Bailey died on Feb. 17, 2004, in Houston, Texas, at the age of 91. She formerly served as a missionary under the FMB as a teacher at the Hawaii Baptist Academy. She also served as youth director at Second Baptist Church in Houston. Janie House was an SBC missionary in Kenya who passed away on Feb. 21 in Nairobi after a brief illness. She was a missionary in Africa, Cyprus, and Thailand for 22 years.

David Willets (‘84) lost his wife, Leesa, and daughter, Lauren, in a car accident in March. Paul Y. Wong (‘74) died on Feb. 5, 2004, in Fremont, Calif., after a brief bout with cancer. He was a servant of Chinese Baptist congregations and founded First Chinese Baptist Churches in Memphis, Tenn., and served as the executive director of the Chinese Baptist Fellowship of the U.S. and Canada and the executive director of the Northern California Chinese Baptist Association.

Gordan Logan (‘51) died on June 30, 2002. He was retired from the NAMB as the DOM in the Blackhawk Association in Illinois. Edward M. Straner (‘53) of East Palatka, Fla., died on Jan. 3, 2004. He served after graduation as a U.S. Air Force chaplain and later as the pastor of several Florida churches. He was a member of the Florida Baptist Historical Society and was the clerk of the St. Johns River Baptist Association for 38 years.

S. Lewis Morgan, Jr. (‘38) died on March 26, 2004. Noel M. Taylor (‘39) died on March 19, 2004 in Carbondale, Ill. He served previously as the executive director of the Illinois Baptist State Association, a former vice president of the SBC and a former president of the Association of Southern Baptist Executive Secretaries.

Annie Ivey (‘42) died on Sept. 2, 2003, in Burlington.

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If you have been called by God into His service, you have been called for His glory. To find out how Southern Seminary can help prepare you to do all things for the glory of God, call us at 1-800-626-5525 or visit us on the Web at www.sbts.edu.