

# BUCKINGHAM

## REPORT

AN IN-DEPTH CRITIQUE OF THE ISSUES, PEOPLE &  
EVENTS AFFECTING TODAY'S CHRISTIAN LEADERS

### FBI WARNS CHURCHES TO EXPECT MAIL BOMBS

Over the last several months two major ministries have received bombs through the mail that exploded when opened. Fortunately, in both cases, no one was killed—although injuries did occur.

John Osteen's daughter narrowly escaped death when a package filled with high explosives and hundreds of large nails exploded in her lap as she was unwrapping it in the mail room of Lakewood Church in Houston. Shortly afterward another bomb exploded in the mail room of the Christian Broadcasting Network in Virginia Beach. The worker was seriously—but not fatally—injured.

The FBI has written letters to church administrators of several denominations warning them to be suspicious of unsolicited packages, especially those coming from the Fayetteville, North Carolina, area.

C.W. Lawrence, postal inspector, has written all national religious broadcasters urging them to be "on the lookout for suspicious packages, letters and other items/articles which may contain explosive devices."

The U.S. Postal Service is making available a leaflet titled "Bombs by Mail," which was originally issued in 1981 but is now being sent to anyone who might be a target for terrorist bombs. If you have not received one, contact your local post office. The leaflet contains instructions on how to help spot a mail bomb. There are also instructions on what to do if you are suspicious:

1. Do not open the article.
2. Isolate the mailing and evacuate the immediate area.
3. Do not put the package in water or in a confined space such as a drawer or filing cabinet.
4. If possible, open windows in the immediate area to assist in venting explosive gases.
5. Do not worry about possible embarrassment if the item turns out to be innocent—instead,

contact your local police department.

### KNOW THY MEMBERS—AND PROSPECTS

Pastors and church leaders should take a lesson from the *Farm*

*Journal*, a 112-year-old magazine that knows far more about its customers than most churches know about their members. By combining their knowledge of their readers, they produce thousands of different customized editions—meeting specific needs.

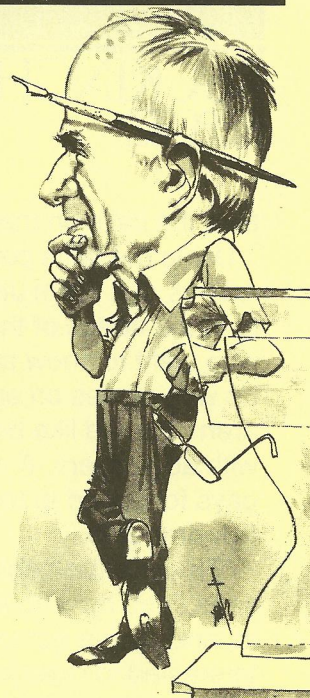
They might print one version of the magazine for a farmer in Angola, Indiana, who has 600 acres of corn and a personal computer, and another version for his neighbor who has 150 acres of corn and a small herd of cows.

"If you don't know the big corn farmers from the little ones, it's difficult to reach them," says Dale Smith, president of Farm Journal Inc. He sounds like the pastor of a progressive church talking about his members.

*Farm Journal* spends half a million dollars each year on a phone center. Here, trained employees—all of whom go by the name of Mrs. Collins or Mr. Adams—make 300,000 calls each year. Each phone call produces information about crops, livestock and farm equipment—as well as whether the farmer owns a VCR or a PC. Combined with information from other surveys, the magazine does one million demographic updates annually.

If a church—any church—were only half as aggressive in caring about their members, attendance and finances would soar.

The farmers, says *Success* magazine, which reported the information, have come to expect that their magazine cares about them. They are eager to comply. They want to be sure they receive the information they need. Some even



JAMIE BUCKINGHAM



take the calls on their tractor phones.

Using the facts collected by Mrs. Collins and Mr. Adams, the *Farm Journal* then targets its stories to fit the needs of the farmers. Readers in Texas who want to know about cotton don't have to put up with stories on apple growing. Dairy farmers aren't treated like hog breeders. The same is true with advertisers. A corn pesticide manufacturer pays for his ad to reach only corn growers, not fish breeders.

"To run a profitable publishing business," Smith says, "you have to know exactly who your reader is, and you've got to have an advertiser who is interested in reaching that reader."

Translate that into the church: "To operate a successful church you have to know exactly who your membership is—and who your prospects are—and have staff and leaders who are interested in meeting those people where they are."

## CHURCH GROWTH RELATED TO MINISTRY TO CHILDREN

A new study by the Barna Research Group identifies the common characteristics of successful churches in America. The one thing all have in common: heavy involvement in ministry to the under-18 crowd. The report shows that about two-thirds of all Christians made a commitment to Christ before age 18, yet the majority of ministry and evangelism funds spent in the United States go to adult-oriented ministries. Case studies of churches growing by more than 10 percent per year indicate:

- Ministering to kids is one way of attracting adults—especially parents.
- Kids have a way of putting life back into a stale environment.
- Reaching youth means making an impact on tomorrow's leaders.
- It's tough to fool youths into accepting mediocrity in ministry, which forces a church into reality and excellence.
- Children are often better able to reach their parents than pastors or evangelists.

The study showed that in successful churches kids were treated like kids—without being condescending. George Barna explained that churches often expect the same things of their

youth that they do of their adults. "Many churches treat kids like miniature adults," he said. "They try to put kids into programs and styles of teaching and worship that don't make sense to youths. Kids have different needs, desires and expectations than adults. Today's kids need to be ministered to differently than yesterday's kids."

Barna found a common characteristic of youth ministry was "organized chaos." The programs encouraged creativity, games and competition as part of the educational process. They were also intent on involving non-parent adults, along with parents, as volunteer youth leaders. "Some churches feel that the only people who can really relate to kids are adults who have children of their own," Barna said. But some of the most successful youth ministries also incorporated the leadership of young adults who did not yet have children.

The final distinctive was that the youth/children's pastor was not seen as a junior staff person. He or she was seen as a full-fledged pastor with a burning desire to work with youth and children.

## PSYCHIATRIST TO GIVE BOOKS TO PASTORS AND LEADERS

One of the most controversial books of last year was written by Birmingham, Alabama, psychiatrist Gerry Hodges. Titled *Jesus: An Interview Across Time*, it is written as an "interview" with Jesus concerning His humanity—and His divinity. Controversy was stirred when a staff theologian for James Kennedy's television program rejected the book because it does not take the position that Jesus had "automatic knowledge" of his divinity from childhood. My younger brother, also a Birmingham medical doctor, reviewed the book for the *Christian Medical & Dental Society Journal*. His bottom line: "As a physician in the front-line assault team for the church's work, I recommend this book to all who are serious about knowing Jesus." It is also recommended by Jay Kesler, president of Taylor University; Landrum Leavell, president of New Orleans Baptist Seminary; and R.C. Sproul, president of Ligonier Ministries.

Dr. Hodges feels strongly the book should be in the hands of *anyone* who wants it—especially Christian leaders. It has subsequently been published as a paperback by Bantam and is accessible at bookstores, but Dr. Hodges wants to



send you a \$16.95 hardcover, **free**. If you want a copy, write Village House Publishers, 3541 Brookwood Road, Birmingham, AL 35223, and ask for the book by name.

## MANAGEMENT BY WALKING AROUND

The latest management technique in the business world is a simple procedure known as Management By Walking Around (MBWA). It consists of the boss simply stopping by and checking on how his guys are doing.

Yet it is more than a casual approach. It is a deliberate procedure of troubleshooting—uncovering problems—before they develop. A pastor or any department leader can use it effectively by making a visit into the home of a key layman, taking one of his committee chairmen to lunch, or walking down the hall on a regular basis to visit an associate or staff member.

Most leaders are not eager to look for trouble. Yet the future of the ministry may depend on your receiving unpleasant facts, figures and impressions in time to do something about them. Where trouble goes unseen, danger lurks.

Last summer, pastor Doug Murren of the fast-growing Eastside Church in Kirkland, Washington, was in the final phases of his building program. Doug had to go out of town for almost a month just as the new \$4 million building was being completed. He checked weekly with his staff by telephone to make certain there was enough money to put on the finishing touches—the nice but unnecessary flourishes that make a building “just right.” Each week his staff reported they still had \$100,000 left in the account to do what they wanted.

At the end of the third week Doug got suspicious. “Each week you’ve told me we still have \$100,000 left in the account. Something’s wrong. Stop all spending immediately.”

“But we’re getting our figures right out of the computer.”

“Forget the computer. I want you to sit down with paper and pencil, bills, invoices and bank statements and tell me exactly how much money we have left in the building fund.”

After two days of figuring, the staff discovered that instead of \$100,000 in the account they had \$1,500. A horrible disaster had barely been averted because the pastor was willing to troubleshoot for possible (and in this case, real)

danger.

Corporate consultant James R. Baehler wrote a book called *The New Manager's Guide to Success*. I've adapted his nine principles of MBWA so we can see how they might apply to church leadership:

**1. Meet on your subordinate's territory.** In a larger church this will mean going into a staff member's office to talk to him. In a smaller situation it might mean visiting a layman in his business office or going to his home. Fancy restaurants and conference rooms inhibit the free flow of ideas.

**2. Talk to people individually.** A staff meeting is no place to bring up personal problems. Besides, the presence of a peer often stifles intimacy. Open discussion is less effective as the group size increases.

**3. Open by stating you are looking for problems.** If you don't, most folks will assume you're just passing the time of day, or you're on a morale-building junket, or you've run out of things to do and are just wandering around until your next appointment.

**4. Do your homework ahead of time.** Before “dropping in,” check your files, ask a few questions of others who may know more than you, and beef up your knowledge on current things in the person's life. Your friends will be more likely to open up if it is obvious you are aware of and sensitive to their problems.

**5. Take your time.** If you constantly look at your watch, most folks will pull the curtain between you. People don't let their hair down in the first few minutes. You need time to socialize before getting to the heart of the issue.

**6. Ask probing questions.** Don't be satisfied with general answers. Insist on specifics. Names. Times. Dates. If you are tracing a rumor—especially if it is one concerning you—never rest until you know exactly who said what and when.

**7. Listen actively.** By this I mean don't pretend to listen while you're looking out the window, sorting through your mail or glancing at a book on the desk. Give undivided attention and respond so your friend will know he's being understood. Use the messages sent by good body language: lean forward, raise an eyebrow, nod and give approving murmurs to encourage additional revelations. Negative signs such as frowns, the shaking head and gritted teeth are a sure way to



cut off truth.

**8. Come back.** It may take more than one visit to get the whole picture. Sometimes a person will reveal only a bit the first time, but will open up much more the second time around. Especially is this true if you are dealing with a layman or someone you don't socialize with on a regular basis. It takes a long time to build confidence. You have to work at it.

**9. Give rewards.** Bearers of bad tidings are always afraid they'll be shot. Instead, send them a little note of thanks, stop by with a personal gift, or if it's a staff member, give him tickets to a ball game or a half-day off. The world gives bonuses as incentives. In the kingdom, the bonus should be given as encouragement—perhaps when a person is down, or has just revealed a weakness that is hindering his progress. In short, let your friends know you appreciate and value their insight and honesty.

## CHURCH MANAGEMENT WISDOM

### **Parkinson's First Law for Any Church Office.**

Work expands to fill the time available for its completion.

**Strickland's Law for Auditorium Sound Systems.** The sound man who smiles when a microphone lets out an ungodly screech has just thought of someone he can blame it on.

**Goodrich's Law of Church Computerdom.** A carelessly planned project takes three times longer to complete on a computer than if it were worked out by hand; a carefully planned computer project only takes twice as long.

**Williams' Theory on Memos to Church Secretaries.** Why tell her face-to-face when you can write it down and make it so complicated she couldn't understand it even if she could read it?

**Bartholomew's Theorum on Youth Programs.** Anything that begins well ends badly. Anything that begins badly ends worse.

**Thompson's Unspeakable Law for New Ideas in Worship Leading.** If it's good, the pastor refuses to let you do it. If it's bad, he urges you to go ahead so you'll look like a fool in front of the church.

**Gaffney's Rules for Expressing Original Ideas in Staff Meetings.** If it's good, it goes away. If it's bad, it happens.

## **Warner's Second Law of Church**

**Maintenance.** Negative expectations calling for church people to clean up and put back always yield negative results. Positive expectations yield negative results, too.

**Jamie's Rule of Accuracy.** When working toward the solution of a problem, it always helps if you know the answer before you start.

## CONGRATS TO CHARISMA

I couldn't close out this issue of the Buckingham Report without a word of congratulations to Stephen Strang and *Charisma* magazine, which is celebrating its 15th anniversary this month. Strang founded *Charisma* in 1975 when he was a reporter for the *Orlando Sentinel* newspaper. Originally a bimonthly publication with just a few thousand subscribers, *Charisma* has grown to become the leader in its field with a worldwide distribution of 200,000.

A two-hour anniversary special hosted by Ben Kinchlow and featuring a variety of top musicians and speakers will be televised on the Trinity Broadcasting Network September 15 and 22. It will also be shown on a number of other networks and independent stations, so check your local listings.

To mark *Charisma's* 15th anniversary, a special subscription price is being offered: 15 months for \$15.00 or 15 years for \$150.00. All those taking advantage of the offer will also receive a copy of the September anniversary issue, which takes a look at 15 of the most significant challenges facing Christians in the '90s.

