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EDITOR'S NOTE: ABP is working on an analysis of changes in the Soviet Union, which will include interviews with Baptist layman and Soviet expert Olin Robison, former FMB executive vice president Bill O'Brien, BJC executive James Dunn and others. We hope to make it available to CompuServe users by late Friday afternoon and to others on request.

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SSB inaugurates Draper,
approves record budget

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- James T. Draper Jr. was inaugurated Aug. 20 as the eighth president in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's 100 years of history.

The ceremony for Draper was sandwiched between two days of meetings as the board's trustees also met for their regular business sessions. A 1991-92 budget was approved, topping \$200 million for the first time.

The new president of the Southern Baptist Convention's publishing and education arm and his family were welcomed in a two-hour celebration in the board's Van Ness Auditorium. At least 1,500 employees and other interested people attended.

Draper succeeds Lloyd Elder, who was forced to retire after seven years as president in a dispute with SSB trustees. Elder will remain in Nashville in a teaching capacity with Belmont College.

During his inauguration message, Draper said the Sunday School Board will remain "true to the Bible." He said that "'thus saith the Lord' ends all controversy."

The former Texas Baptist pastor quoted from J. M. Frost, the board's first chief executive, in an introduction to the book "Baptist Why or Why Not," published by the board in 1900.

Noting the board's heritage, Draper quoted Frost's words: "We accept the Scriptures as an all-sufficient and infallible rule of faith and

practice and insist upon the absolute inerrancy and sole authority of the Word of God. We recognize at this point no room for division, either of practice or belief, or even sentiment. More and more we must come to feel as the deepest and mightiest power of our conviction that a 'thus saith the Lord' ends all controversy."

Of Frost's use of the word "inerrancy," Draper quipped, "that 'new' word that people say we never had around here before."

"That's our history," Draper added. "That's where we have been. We'll not deviate from that. That's where the track has been going all this time."

★ Later, in their business session, trustees voted to put Frost's quote on a plaque to be placed in the board's Nashville offices.

Participants on the inauguration program represented the Southern Baptist Convention, state Baptist conventions, churches, directors of missions, and employees. Other speakers included SBC president Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, and former president Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn.

Draper, 55, was elected July 18 and assumed the presidency Aug. 17 after 16 years as pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas.

Other former SBC presidents attending the service were Atlanta evangelist Bailey Smith and Franklin Paschall, former pastor of First Baptist Church of Nashville.

Two of the three living former board presidents, Elder and James Sullivan, attended the inauguration. Retired board president Grady Cothen, who now lives in Coral Springs, Fla., sent a letter of greeting.

Draper pledged to emphasize four dimensions of leadership -- spiritual, business, organization and people. He said he will represent the board to its constituencies -- churches, associations, state conventions and SBC agencies and institutions. He praised the "strong structure" of the board and its "wonderful foundation and success we have to build on."

Besides Chapman and Rogers, others participating on the program were D. L. Lowrie, Tennessee Baptist Convention executive director; Luther Dyer, retired director of missions from Lakeland, Fla.; board chairman Bill Anderson of Clearwater, Fla.; Bobby Welch, vice chairman of the presidential search committee, Daytona Beach, Fla.; Leland Cunningham, 35-year SSB employee; Frank Palmer, trustee from Redmond, Ore.; and Joy Lang, 45-year employee of the Baptist Book Store in Houston.

The new president's brother, Charles Draper, a pastor from Honolulu, Hawaii, closed the program with prayer. Music was provided by the choir and orchestra of Two Rivers Baptist Church, Nashville.

During the business sessions, it was noted that the board has sold a million copies of the new Baptist Hymnal. Those sales amounting to more than \$6 million have boosted the year-to-date financial report above budget.

Trustees approved a \$205.3 million budget for 1991-92, \$14.8 million above the current operating budget. It marks the first time an SBC agency has passed a \$200 million budget.

Trustees also voted to eliminate a previously approved 5 percent price increase for dated church literature and instead to initiate a 6 percent shipping-and-handling charge on all retail orders, beginning in January 1992.

The mid-year financial report revealed that "while it appears likely that the SSB will generate the highest total revenue in history, this does

not translate to the best financial year in its history."

The report said that funds provided from operations "are not likely to approach the level achieved in fiscal year 1983-84."

Reports were given on product sales of more than 11,000 copies of the first volume of the New American Commentary released in June, and more than 16,000 copies of the Holman Bible Dictionary. The second commentary volume is scheduled for a September release.

Harry Piland, director of the Sunday school division, reported that new "Breakthrough" Sunday school literature is being shipped to churches for the fall quarter and that plans to train "Breakthrough" consultants across the country are on schedule.

Gains were shown in Baptist Book Stores, Holman and Broadman publishing, and Convention Press. Church literature sales were reported at 4.4 percent above last year but 0.8 percent below budget, with an estimated actual decline of 1.3 percent in unit sales.

Declines in sales were reported in the areas of Genevox Music and Church Information Systems. Revenue from operation of conference centers, while 0.9 percent above last year, continued to be 1.9 percent below budget. The report said improvements in accounting and distribution operations will save the board more than \$900,000 annually.

Officers re-elected include Bill Anderson, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Clearwater, Fla., chairman; Eugene Mims, pastor of First Baptist Church, Cleveland, Tenn., vice chairman and chairman of executive committee; and Burgess Guinn, layman from Cornersville, Tenn., recording secretary.

A committee was named to study the feasibility and need for election of local trustees to the board. Present guidelines allow several trustees from a close radius to Nashville to be elected in addition to those representing state conventions. It was noted that some SBC institutions are moving to eliminate the local trustees.

James Williams, executive vice president of the Sunday School Board, attended his last meeting. He announced his resignation during the summer and has been elected executive director of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission.

Chairman Anderson named a committee "to work with the administration" in selecting a successor to Williams. The committee includes Dan Collins, Taylors, S.C.; Al Jackson, Auburn, Ala.; Rick Forrester, Lawrenceville, Ga.; Palmer; and Kirk Humphreys, Oklahoma City, Okla. Anderson and Mims will serve as needed.

Two additional consulting editors for the New American Commentary, already in production, were approved: Richard Melick, professor at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tenn.; and Duane Garrett, Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary professor.

In other action, Sunday School Board trustees:

--Approved the closing of the Baptist Book Store in Albuquerque, N.M., because of marginal profits, and the opening of a Baptist Book Store in Lexington, Ky., in July 1992;

--Approved rate increases averaging 4.8 percent at Ridgecrest and Glorieta Baptist Conference centers, effective next summer;

--Changed the frequency of publication for Discipleship Training leadership magazine from monthly to quarterly;

--Approved deletion of the periodical Equipping Youth because of "declining sales and an annual financial loss";

--Changed the August 1992 board of trustees' meeting site from

Nashville to Ridgecrest; and approved Glorieta as the August 1993 site.

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CLC's agenda, budget
demonstrate new course

By Lacy Thompson

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- When fundamental-conservatives took charge of the Christian Life Commission in the late 1980s, they said Southern Baptists wanted a different sort of ethics agency.

They have since delivered on their promise of reform by hiring a director who supports conservative social causes, replacing by attrition the rest of the professional staff members, and directing more of the agency's energy to political action.

The CLC's revised agenda became a matter of debate recently with the launch of a new Baptist agency for ethics.

Organizers of the new Baptist Center for Ethics have tried to walk a rhetorical tightrope, insisting the BCE is not designed to counter the Christian Life Commission while talking about the need to fill a "vacuum" in Southern Baptist ethics.

At a July press conference announcing the BCE, which like the CLC will be based in Nashville, Tenn., organizers said the new center will address a broader range of issues than the CLC, which they said has confined itself to a "limited agenda" -- primarily abortion and pornography.

CLC Executive Director Richard Land agrees the Christian Life Commission is different than when he took over in 1988, but he insists Southern Baptists are pleased with the change.

New materials and emphases from the CLC have been well received, Land said, and the agency has been faithful to its assignment as the Southern Baptist Convention's voice on ethics and religious liberty. "I don't think there is any confusion over who speaks for the majority of Southern Baptists....," he said.

There is disagreement from some quarters, however, on whether changes to the CLC's staff, agenda and products are improvements on the past.

Staff. Critics say the staff of the Christian Life Commission is not equipped to address the agency's broad assignment on social and moral issues. They point out that as of Sept. 1, when all pre-Land staff members have departed the professional staff, there will be left no one with doctoral training in ethics on a staff that once had seven with such training.

In September, Land will nominate current CLC trustee Ben Mitchell of Hixon, Tenn, as director of biomedical and life issues. Mitchell, 36, is pursuing a doctorate in biomedical ethics at the University of Tennessee but won't receive the degree until at least 1993.

Land, who holds a doctorate in historical theology, defended the CLC trend away from trained ethicists. "It was never the best thing for all the staff to be trained in one academic field," he told Associated Baptist Press recently.

The commission's Washington office, which handles religious-liberty issues, has a three-person staff, at least on paper. However, General Counsel Michael Whitehead left Washington in January to work from Kansas

City, where he practiced law before joining the CLC staff. At the time Whitehead said the unexpected death of his former law partner required his presence in the city.

The arrangement was for Whitehead to work three-quarter time for the commission for six months from Kansas City and then return to Washington. After seven months, however, he continues to work out of Kansas City.

Land said the arrangement recently was extended and will be reviewed by trustees in September.

Agenda. Critics contend the commission now spends most of its energy on two issues -- abortion and pornography. A recent study of news stories produced by the CLC staff supports those claims.

Of the 49 CLC articles on ethical issues released between August 1990 and July 1991, more than 70 percent dealt with abortion and obscenity.

"Unfortunately, we don't have a two-issue world," wrote Marv Knox, editor of the Western Recorder of Kentucky, which did the study. "Other ethical issues need thorough treatment."

The review by the Western Recorder indicated 18 articles (36.7 percent) addressed homosexuality/obscenity and 17 articles (34.7 percent) addressed abortion. The remaining 14 articles were distributed among other topics of ethical interest -- the environment, the Persian Gulf War, AIDS, euthanasia, alcohol, race relations, the family and gambling.

Land said the CLC is not limiting its focus by giving significant attention to abortion and pornography. The agency is instead responding to the public's agenda -- particularly as it unfolds in Washington.

"We don't have the luxury of setting the agenda of what goes on in Washington," he told ABP. "We respond to it and we report on it."

Land said the broader range of topics -- such as race, addictions, the environment and the family -- are addressed in the CLC's conferences, seminars and publications. "But those other issues just don't get as much attention" in the media, he said.

Yet Land does not apologize for his agency's focus on abortion. "If we are being charged with giving significant emphasis to what is the critical moral issue of our time, we plead guilty," he said.

Conferences. Attendance of CLC seminars under Land has suffered. In his first annual seminar in 1989, 422 persons registered, including speakers, CLC staff, reporters and some very large church groups. The seminar attracted 222 registrants in 1990 and 121 in 1991.

In the three years prior to Land's election, annual seminars averaged 407 paid and unpaid registrants. In Land's three years, the average has fallen to 255.

Meanwhile, none of three special conferences sponsored or jointly sponsored by the commission has attracted more than 232 registrants.

Product sales. Revenue from material sales has increased during Land's tenure. In his first year, sales plummeted to \$68,584, its lowest level in more than a decade. In the second year, sales rebounded to \$111,072, aided in part by a price increase of about 10 percent.

This year, product sales had reached \$120,000 by the end of July, and commission leaders expect the total to be one of the highest in the agency's history.

Compared to sales in the year prior to Land's election, current sales are running ahead of the rate of inflation.

Much of the increase comes as a result of abortion materials. CLC Associate Director Louis Moore reports "Critical Issues: What the Bible Teaches about Abortion," produced in 1989, is the biggest seller for the agency.

In addition, bulletin sales for Sanctity of Human Life Sunday have grown from 16,000 in 1989 to some 400,000 this year, accounting for as much as \$25,000 in sales.

Moore said there are no specific figures available on which materials are selling best, but all are selling.

Much of the material being sold is not of Land's design, however. Most commission materials were produced prior to Land's arrival and continue to be reprinted and sold -- a fact not all Southern Baptists may realize.

In an apparent reference to materials produced by Land's predecessors -- and still being sold -- commission trustee Gary Ledbetter, editor of the Indiana Baptist, wrote in a recent editorial that the effort to start an alternative ethics agency "seems to be based on the assumption that our people are somehow nostalgic for the days of predictably leftist and mealy-mouthed statements and resources related to moral issues."

Product production. There has been an apparent shift in the kind of materials being produced by the commission under Land -- away from brochure-size publications to smaller tract-like releases.

In the last three years, commission trustees have pulled four brochures from circulation -- three in the "Issues and Answers" series -- on abortion, the role of women and capital punishment -- and one on women in church and society in the "Critical Issues" series.

None of the pulled publications have been directly replaced, even though commission leaders indicated at the time the materials were withdrawn that replacements would be produced in a matter of months.

Land said production of new materials has been slowed by the need to expand the CLC's Washington office.

"We'd love to do more," Land said, "but I think we've done a credible job given we don't have control over our agenda. We have to respond to the directions of the convention."

The commission has produced two new materials on abortion -- a brochure in the "Critical Issues" series, written by Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis and a tri-fold tract written by Land called "Is Life a Right?"

Other new materials are an eight-panel tract on Christian citizenship by Land; four one-page bulletin inserts on the environment; a four-part pamphlet series on pornography that includes both old and new material; and a four-part series of brochures on AIDS that was under development when Land was elected. The commission also has revised an "Issues and Answers" brochure on hunger.

Moore said pieces on capital punishment and religious liberty are "in the works" and that "we are supposed to get a new one on abortion."

Even with those additions, the commission may face a mammoth production task in the future, as much of the commission's materials, produced in the 1970s, require updating.

Under Land, the Commission has launched one new periodical and increased the circulation of another.

In relation to the CLC's expanded role in Washington, a new quarterly newsletter titled Salt was started to address the public-policy aspects of moral, social, ethical and religious-liberty concerns.

Circulation of the commission's Light magazine has risen under Land, from 53,000 to 77,000, although the number of issues has been reduced.

Both Salt and Light are mailed free to the same subscription list, which includes all Southern Baptist pastors and directors of missions.

Budget. Critics often cite the work of the commission in Washington as evidence of the agency's shift toward political action and away from ethical education of Baptists.

Land says such a characterization is unfair. "It would be impossible for anyone to look at our budget and come to that conclusion," he said. He noted that a majority of the commission budget goes to the agency's traditional Nashville-based operations. "Obviously, there has been some change of focus (with the opening of the Washington office), but we're doing what the convention told us to do," Land said.

CLC treasurer Jean Hall confirmed that 65 percent of the commission's money goes to Nashville operations, with the remaining 35 percent being spent in Washington.

However, in one sense, the Washington work has grown at the expense of Nashville efforts. The commission is able to fund its SBC-mandated efforts in Washington thanks to a 56 percent increase in Southern Baptist Convention allocations since 1988-89 -- totaling \$482,000.

For 1990-91, an estimated \$494,000 will be spent by the commission in Washington, which means in effect that all of the SBC increase, plus some, is being spent in Washington. That also means the Nashville operation has received no new money since Land was elected. In fact, it's funding has decreased slightly.

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-- Contributing to this story was Greg Warner of Associated Baptist Press.

Criswell researcher
headed to CLC staff

DALLAS (ABP) -- Keith Ninomia, who for most of the past decade has chronicled the Southern Baptist controversy for Criswell College and its president, Paige Patterson, may soon begin plying his research talents at the SBC Christian Life Commission.

Richard Land, executive director of the CLC, acknowledged he will hire Ninomia as the agency's researcher and archivist if CLC trustees approve the staff-level position during their meeting Sept. 10-12. Ninomia probably will start Nov. 1, Land said.

According to Patterson, who has supervised Ninomia's work for "eight or nine years," Ninomia's task has been "to collect everything written and said that impinges on events of the last 12 years" in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Ninomia reportedly has amassed the most complete record of the SBC controversy anywhere, providing Patterson and others with details in their campaign against liberalism in the denomination.

Patterson described the former Criswell College student as "a living, walking, breathing computer, the type that gets all the information." Recent budget cuts at Criswell forced the elimination of Ninomia's position, Patterson said.

Land, who worked with Ninomia when Land was dean of Criswell College, called his former and perhaps future associate "a genius." But Land said

the researcher's role at the CLC will be different than at Criswell.

"Keith is being hired because of his intuitive expertise as a researcher and his uncanny ability to generate information and keep it at his fingertips," Land explained. "We have discussed at length his research within the convention controversy. His activities for the CLC will involve research, archiving and filing in the areas within our program assignment.

"He will not in any way, shape or form, on CLC resources, on CLC premises, or on CLC time, be involved in the activities which have occupied some of his time in the past," Land said.

"He will not be doing any research on convention controversy issues while he's on the CLC's nickel," Land continued. "I have been offended enough at the impropriety of convention agency personnel engaging in convention controversy activities in the past that I wanted to make it absolutely clear...that he is coming here to use his God-given abilities for the service of the Christian Life Commission and the Southern Baptist Convention."

Ninomia, a graduate of the University of Hawaii, could not be reached for comment.

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-- By Greg Warner

N.C. church hears both sides
before deciding on funding

By Christopher Quinn

HICKORY, N.C. (ABP) -- The debate between fundamental-conservative and moderate-conservative Baptists that has played itself out for 12 years in the Southern Baptist Convention recently came to First Baptist Church in Hickory, N.C., in a unique way.

The church became the first Southern Baptist congregation to invite the top leaders from both camps to explain their views to its members.

John Hewett, moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate-conservative organization, spoke from the church's pulpit Sunday, Aug. 18. And Morris Chapman, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, which is controlled by fundamental-conservatives, spoke and fielded questions Aug. 21.

At stake is \$120,000 that the church gives to Baptist missions each year. The Southern Baptist Convention funds missions through the Cooperative Program. In May the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship launched three alternate-funding plans that withhold money from some SBC causes and fund new Fellowship-sponsored ventures.

Thomas Melzoni Jr., pastor of First Baptist, said the 1,800-member congregation has placed its missions offerings in escrow until it decides which group to give them to.

"I believe very strongly in telling people everything and trusting them to make decisions," he said before the meeting with Chapman.

The current dispute over funding grew from the election of fundamental-conservative leaders to the Southern Baptist Convention beginning in 1979. Since then, those leaders have forced many moderate-conservative Baptist leaders into early retirement and have fired others.

The moderate-conservatives have charged that the fundamental-

conservatives are excluding them from participation in the denomination. The fundamental-conservatives counter that they are bringing the denomination back to its conservative roots.

Melzoni said that even though the leaders of both factions have battled each other vociferously at national conventions, the people filling the pews have been largely uninvolved.

However, when disgruntled moderate-conservatives formed the Fellowship in late 1990, laymen began to take notice.

"It's a very important time for our church and all Southern Baptist churches to determine where to channel our funds," Melzoni said.

Melzoni, who came to Hickory about three months ago, served with Chapman at First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, for three years. He also was an associate of W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas and a leader in the fundamental-conservative ranks.

"I was very much involved in the 1979 and '80 effort (to gain control of the SBC) because I did believe changes needed to be made," Melzoni said. "But I feel like the pendulum has swung too far. We are seeing throats cut and good people excluded from service, and that bothers me."

Melzoni said he decided to educate his congregation by inviting leaders from the disparate groups and allowing them to present their sides. Members of other congregations heard about the meetings and attended as well.

Eric McNeely, a lifelong member of First Baptist, said: "A lot of people are confused. Hopefully, these two nights will help settle this issue."

Timothy Deaton, a member of another nearby church, said: "A lot of churches are really undecided about what to do. But this will probably make the difference in helping First Baptist to decide."

As Chapman fielded questions about his leadership and beliefs, some heads nodded in assent. Many others shook side to side.

The church members will decide in 30 days where to send their money.

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-- Christopher Quinn is a reporter for the Winston-Salem (N.C.) Journal.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is an updated version of a story released to CompuServe users Aug. 19.

Houston church elects
Dan Vestal as pastor

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Atlanta pastor Daniel Vestal, who in recent years has been the key figure in the moderate-conservative movement among Southern Baptists, will become pastor of Tallowood Baptist Church in Houston.

A native Texan, Vestal was overwhelmingly elected by members of the Houston congregation Sunday, Aug. 18, after preaching in the morning worship service. His acceptance of the call was announced later that day in the evening service.

Vestal, 46, leaves Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, where he has been pastor since October 1988. He told the 3,800-member Atlanta congregation of the potential move Aug. 12, noting, "I began to feel

several months ago that my ministry was coming to a conclusion here."

Vestal's election was approved by approximately 96 percent of Tallowood members on a ballot vote. According to a Tallowood spokesperson, the new pastor is expected to begin his ministry at the 5,500-member church Sept. 16 and preach his first sermon Sept. 29.

In recent years, Vestal has been a prominent figure in Southern Baptist life. He twice was unsuccessful in bids for the SBC presidency, losing in 1989 and 1990 to the fundamental-conservative candidates.

After his second defeat, he convened a national meeting of moderate-conservatives in August 1990 in Atlanta which led to formation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship last May. Earlier this year, Vestal relinquished his leadership role in the Fellowship.

Vestal discounted suggestions his departure from Dunwoody after only three years is related to his high visibility in SBC politics and the Fellowship. "My decision to go to Tallowood is not related to the convention controversy," he told Associated Baptist Press.

The pastor praised Dunwoody members, who have been "wonderfully supportive" of his role in the moderate-conservative movement. "There are individuals in the church -- and I am one of them -- who wish I didn't have such a high profile," he added. But to link his move to Houston with those sentiments "is to misinterpret my move," he said.

"I had hoped I'd be here (in Atlanta) for a lot longer time," he said. "I've never made a move without the intention that I'd stay the rest of my life. But God's will is not always like that."

Although his new pastorate allows Vestal to return to his native Texas, he downplayed that as a factor in the decision. "Early in your ministry you need to determine that geography doesn't matter," he said.

What matters is determining the will of God, Vestal said, adding in that regard he is convinced the move to Tallowood is "part of his unfolding plan."

Vestal said he feels "a keen sense of direction" about the move to Tallowood but also a sense of loss about leaving the Dunwoody pastorate. "I have grown to love Atlanta and the Southeast and feel I am leaving a part of me here."

From his time in the Southeast Vestal said he has acquired "a better understanding of the diversity among us as Southern Baptists."

Concerning his future involvement with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Vestal said: "I care deeply about this denomination. I care deeply about the Fellowship. I'm going to continue to care...but I am not going to be the leader of the Fellowship."

A graduate of Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, both in Texas, Vestal served as pastor of the 7,800-member First Baptist Church of Midland, Texas, before moving to Atlanta.

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--By Greg Warner

Woman accepts pastorate
of rural Missouri church

By Trennis Henderson

MIAMI, Mo. (ABP) -- Miami, Mo., a tiny community near the Missouri

River, is not often the site of trend-setting activities. Yet the members of First Baptist Church of Miami have quietly accomplished what may be a first in Missouri Baptist life.

First Baptist members recently extended a unanimous call to a woman, Rita Moore, to serve as their pastor. Following several weeks as the church's supply preacher, Moore officially became the congregation's pastor the first week of August.

Moore, 47, graduated last year from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City with a master of divinity degree. Her husband, Jerry, who is pursuing a music degree at Midwestern, is serving as Miami's volunteer music director.

Rita Moore's primary ministry experience has involved leading weekday worship services for the past four years at a Kansas City retirement center. She is neither licensed nor ordained to the ministry.

Ordination "raises more red flags than the pastorate does," she explained. "I haven't pushed it and I won't push it."

"She preaches the Word out of the Bible and that's the main thing," explained Tom Fisher, one of First Baptist's three deacons. Fisher said church members accepted the couple from the start. "If they preach the Word, that's all we're after."

How does the tiny church like the distinction of hiring Missouri Baptists' first woman pastor? "We need to be No. 1 in something sometime," Fisher responded.

According to Betty Winstead McGary, former president of Southern Baptist Women in Ministry, there currently are about 11 or 12 women pastors in the Southern Baptist Convention and about 30 women who are associate pastors.

The church was not seeking to make a political statement with its actions, deacon Fisher insisted. "You've got to leave politics out of a Christian church," he said. "A church won't grow and Southern Baptists won't grow as long as there is politics. In this little church, all you find is love and friendliness."

From a practical perspective, Fisher acknowledged it is difficult to attract a pastor to a small church in a small community. Miami has 172 residents. First Baptist has 16 resident members. "We're a small church and we can't afford to pay much," Fisher pointed out.

For Rita Moore, who is legally blind but "not very limited," accepting the Miami pastorate "is just what the Lord has called me to do. A lot of people expect me to be making a (political) statement, but I'm not."

Growing up in a "very, very conservative" Southern Baptist home, Moore said that when she first sensed a call to ministry, "I assumed it would be missions."

She and her husband applied for appointment as missionaries through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, but their application was rejected. Rita Moore cited "a combination of circumstances," including her limited vision and the age of their children.

"It never occurred to me that I would be called into the pastorate until the Foreign Mission Board turned me down," she reflected. Even when she "could hear the Lord calling me into the pastorate," she said, "I ignored it for a year."

The Moores were members of Covenant Baptist Church in Kansas City before she accepted the call to Miami. At Covenant Church, Jerry served as music director and Rita worked in the church's service center to the poor.

"She was an effective minister here," said Covenant pastor Darrell

Rickard. "They were both very effective. They're sound theologically and conservatively, I think."

Rita Moore "is especially adept at theology," her former pastor added. "I thought her real career goal was in the area of teaching, but she didn't hide it when she felt like she was feeling called to be a pastor."

Rickard declined to voice a personal opinion about Moore accepting the pastorate of the Miami church, but he noted, "if we believe in the autonomy of the local church, we have to leave it up to them."

Neal Turnbaugh, director of missions for Saline Baptist Association, of which First Baptist is a member, expressed a similar view. "My personal opinion doesn't matter," he remarked. "It's a local church decision and I will stand between them and anybody who tries to make life miserable for them. Anybody who tries to cause commotion would be out of bounds."

"Some of these churches are so small, a man just can't afford to be pastor unless he is retired or bivocational," Turnbaugh pointed out. "I personally think we'll see more of this thing in small, rural churches in the future. I'm not advocating it or saying it's right or wrong, but I think it's the wave of the future."

Concerning her call to the pastorate, Rita Smith said: "Nothing else would still the pressure inside of me. It was something I needed to be doing and resisted doing for a long time. Once I acknowledged the call, my sense of purpose became clear."

Accepting her call to the ministry gave Rita Moore "a sense of relief," said husband Jerry. "I have seen the frustration she has gone through. I know the gifts she has."

Jerry Moore noted that the "typical" pastor's spouse in a rural church often plays the piano and leads the music. "That's exactly what I'm doing and it is in line with my calling."

Moore said he also reads the Scripture during his wife's sermons, since chorioretinitis has left her with only peripheral vision. Each week, she memorizes either her sermon manuscript or an outline of it. "We work as a team -- like a double-barrel shotgun," Moore said. "So far, it's been a great experience."

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U.S. government approves agency
to accredit inerrantist schools

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. (ABP) -- The Transnational Association of Christian Schools, a national accrediting agency for Christian post-secondary institutions, has received the approval of the U.S. Department of Education.

Accreditation will give added credibility to the degrees awarded by TRACS members, including Luther Rice Seminary of Atlanta and Liberty University of Lynchburg, Va. Criswell College of Dallas, one of TRACS's founding members, has since dropped its involvement for financial reasons.

TRACS was founded in 1979 to serve as a national accrediting agency for Christian institutions that believe in biblical inerrancy, biblical authority, creationism and the historicity of the first 11 chapters of Genesis, according to a news release from the agency.

According to Gene Williams, president of Luther Rice Seminary, accreditation means the seminary, which recently moved from Jacksonville,

Fla., will be recognized as an institution of quality education.

The degrees granted by Luther Rice and other TRACS schools now will be accepted by other educational institutions, enabling graduates to transfer credits or pursue graduate degrees in other accredited universities, colleges or seminaries. Students also will become eligible for federal financial aid programs, such as Pell grants. And TRACS schools will qualify for endowment grants, most of which are restricted to accredited institutions.

Accreditation will provide another distinction for Luther Rice, which is known primarily as a correspondence school. "The most important aspect of accreditation is that Luther Rice Seminary will be recognized as the only fully accredited, non-traditional theological seminary in existence," said Williams.

Paige Patterson, president of Criswell College, said he was involved in the founding of TRACS but has since resigned his position on the board of directors. He said, however, he remains keenly interested in the agency, which he said has "real viability" for accrediting theological schools in the United States and overseas.

Criswell College dropped its accreditation through TRACS and the American Association of Bible Colleges because the accreditation process is expensive and the school "is not flush with funds," Patterson said. Criswell still maintains accreditation through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, he added.

Patterson said TRACS was formed because of the "ideological abuse" inflicted on conservative schools by established agencies, like the Association of Theological Schools, on such issues as evolution and inerrancy.

He said he is pleased the Department of Education "decided ideological reasons are not good reasons for refusing" recognition to TRACS, which had met the department's nine criteria for approval.

Although TRACS could serve as an accrediting agency for the six Southern Baptist seminaries, Patterson said he did not expect that to happen in the near future. "At the present time the seminaries would have no need," he said.

All six seminaries are accredited by the Association of Theological Schools and regional agencies like SACS. However, trustees of several SBC seminaries have expressed displeasure with some actions of their accrediting agencies.

Patterson said those agencies, by their own restrictions, are not supposed to concern themselves with ideological issues, such as whether a school teaches creationism or has female trustees.

"What could create a place for TRACS with our six seminaries is if the accrediting agencies insist on impacting ideology," he said.

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--By Jack Brymer and Greg Warner

FBC Jacksonville to build
\$15.6 million auditorium

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Members of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville voted July 28 to proceed with construction of a 9,000-seat

auditorium, which will cost \$15.6 million and be paid for in cash.

The structure will cover an entire city block in downtown Jacksonville, adjacent to the present 3,500-seat sanctuary, which was built in 1976.

The Jacksonville church is one of the largest in the country, with a total membership of about 20,000. Co-pastors of the church are Jerry Vines, a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Homer Lindsay Jr.

Lindsay told the congregation that construction will begin immediately. The project, according to Dudley Freeman, the church's construction administrator, will take approximately 18 months.

The church, which since 1943 has had a cash-only policy for paying for construction, began saving for the new building in 1987, according to Lindsay.

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--By Jack Brymer

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