
A S S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

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Jess Moody seeks SBC 'healing' through presidential election

By Greg Warner

VAN NUYS, Calif. (ABP) -- California pastor Jess Moody has agreed to be nominated for the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention next year in a last-ditch attempt to heal the rift between the two factions that have fought for control of the SBC for more than a decade.

Moody, pastor of Shepherd of the Hills Church in Van Nuys, Calif., confirmed Aug. 28 that a group of non-aligned pastors and others has asked him to allow his nomination as president.

Moody reportedly will be nominated by country comedian and Baptist layman Jerry Clower of Yazoo City, Miss., who has written current president Morris Chapman to state his intention. Clower could not be reached for comment.

A president committed to healing the denominational rift is "the last hope for the Southern Baptist Convention," Moody told Associated Baptist Press Aug. 28.

"I fear for the future of the convention unless some spirit of reconciliation sweeps the convention," Moody said. "We've tried fighting. Now let's try love."

"There are a lot of people who are ready for a healer," said Don Letzring, pastor of Wellwood Baptist Church in Tampa, Fla., and chairman of the ad hoc committee that drafted Moody for the presidency.

Letzring's committee has been conducting its quiet campaign on Moody's behalf since May, writing letters and enlisting supporters from several states. The 15-member committee is composed mostly of Florida pastors, many of whom have not previously been involved in the politicking that has consumed the SBC for more than a decade.

Since 1979, SBC fundamental-conservatives have elected a succession of

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seven presidents in a coordinated effort to turn the denomination in a more conservative direction. A successor to two-term president Chapman will be chosen in June 1992, when the Southern Baptist Convention meets in Indianapolis, Ind.

Behind the movement toward Moody, supporters say, is growing dissatisfaction with both fundamental-conservative control of the SBC and the trend toward disassociation from the denomination, as some moderate-conservatives are advocating.

Such a "third party" candidacy could add a new wrinkle to a denominational squabble that many observers thought had died down.

"Our pulse of the convention is that there is a feeling there needs to be a coming back to the middle," said Letzring.

Morris Chapman, when asked if he detected any movement away from current convention leadership, said, "I believe grass-roots Southern Baptists have spoken and will continue to express a strong affinity for those who take an unequivocal and uncompromising stand for God's Word." He would not say if Moody is such a person.

Chapman acknowledged receiving Clower's letter and said he knows nothing of "any other potential nominees."

Letzring was reluctant to discuss the Moody campaign, which he said has been "very low key."

"One of the things our committee wants to avoid...is a media battle," he said, noting news of Moody's nomination likely will spark a renewal of SBC politicking.

He said the ad hoc committee is composed of all sorts of Southern Baptists, including some who have voted for the fundamental-conservative candidates in the past.

However, he acknowledged that, by nominating a candidate who is opposed to the continued control of the SBC by fundamental-conservatives, the committee likely will be perceived as part of the moderate-conservative movement. "Perhaps so, but theologically I'm as conservative as any of them," Letzring said.

"We don't want to be in a fight with anyone," he continued. "We want to be loving and Christian.... We want to be as positive as we can be."

Letzring also said his group will nominate Arizona pastor Richard Jackson for president of the SBC Pastors' Conference in an attempt to return the conference "to a forum to meet pastors' needs" instead of a staging ground for presidential politics.

But Jackson, pastor of North Phoenix Baptist Church in Phoenix, told ABP he is "not interested" in the job. Jackson, who twice lost bids for the SBC presidency, acknowledged talking to Letzring about the pastors' post but said, "I'm not going to do that."

Moody, 66, has been pastor of the Van Nuys congregation near Los Angeles since 1976. The Southern Baptist church, formerly First Baptist of Van Nuys, recently changed its name to Shepherd of the Hills Church.

A native of Texas, Moody previously was pastor of First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach, Fla., and founding president of Palm Beach Atlantic College in that city.

He was an unsuccessful candidate for SBC president in 1966, when he lost to Franklin Paschall of Nashville, Tenn. Moody was president of the SBC Pastors' Conference in 1965.

Moody said he was picked by Letzring and his committee because he is one of the most prominent SBC figures who has not taken sides in the dispute.

Moody got the attention of many Southern Baptists last summer when in a widely circulated article he said the current divisive course of the SBC would lead to the convention's destruction in "two years or less."

The article, printed in many state Baptist newspapers, called on fundamental-conservatives to share power with moderate-conservatives in proportion with the presidential vote, which has averaged about 55 percent to 45 percent during the controversy. And he called on leaders of both sides to repent of political wrongdoing.

"The method we have used to get healing has failed," Moody said in an interview Aug. 28. "All the (presidents since 1979) have done a good job. I'm not mad at anybody on either side. But they haven't succeeded at getting the job done."

Moody said that because of his concern for the denomination he "reluctantly agreed" when Letzring asked him to allow his nomination.

"I will not run," Moody said of the presidency. "I will allow my name to be put up, but I will not lift a finger to get it."

Both Moody and Letzring said they are dependent on a grass-roots endorsement of their goal.

"If there is no groundswell," Moody said, "if there is a lukewarm, lackadaisical response, then I would bow out by December."

Moody said he also would drop his presidential bid if another candidate adopts his platform of inclusiveness and renewal. "I'm not interested in being president of the SBC for the honor of it," he said.

Moody listed seven things he would do if elected. "The first thing I'd do is demand a recount," he joked.

To begin the SBC's healing, Moody said, he would:

-- Consult the leaders of all "reasonable factions who believe the Bible to be truly God's Word" and make sure both sides are represented in his presidential appointments;

-- Call for a campaign to baptize 1 million people in 1994 and maintain that level of baptisms for a decade;

-- Call for "a return to strong revival meetings" in local churches, spearheaded by the SBC Home Mission Board;

-- Call for a "return to old-fashioned Sunday school evangelism, teaching the department heads to offer an evangelistic invitation regularly in their classes";

-- Conduct a national soul-winning conference in 1993, led by the HMB and SBC Sunday School Board; and

-- Call for the "dissolution" of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Atlanta-based moderate-conservative organization that eschews political activity but advocates diverting money from SBC causes.

Moody said this last plank in his presidential platform is "the one that will get me defeated." While he acknowledged many moderate-conservatives would consider his one-year reform inadequate, Moody added: "You have to crawl before you walk. I can only do what I can do as one man."

"Although the Atlanta group is small, they are profound in influence," he said, adding that many people who can't join the movement are nonetheless sympathetic.

Moody said people on both sides of the 12-year SBC controversy have labeled his refusal to take sides as cowardice. "But it takes more courage to lose all your friends than to lose half of them," he said.

"I'm trying to build a bridge between these two groups, who secretly love each other," Moody said. "And I want them to let the secret out,

because a waiting world is watching, and they're not very impressed."

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Leaders show little enthusiasm
for Jess Moody's nomination

By Greg Warner

(ABP) -- Leaders on both sides of the Southern Baptist Convention controversy showed little enthusiasm at news that California pastor Jess Moody will be nominated for SBC president in an effort to heal the growing rift in the denomination.

Moody, pastor of Shepherd of the Hills Church in Van Nuys, Calif., confirmed Aug. 28 he has agreed to be nominated for SBC president next June at the request of a group of pastors and others who have not previously been involved in the denominational strife.

Moody said electing a president committed to healing the decade-long denominational division is "the last hope for the Southern Baptist Convention." His backers have been organizing support in several states since May.

"Individual Baptists have to make up their own minds, but I certainly have no heart for this," said John Hewett, moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. "I am not going to spend the next year of my life doing precinct politics trying to take back the Southern Baptist Convention. I'm not interested in that."

Morris Chapman, who was elected to a second term as SBC president in June, said he has not detected any movement away from current convention leadership.

"I believe grass-roots Southern Baptists have spoken and will continue to express a strong affinity for those who take an unequivocal and uncompromising stand for God's Word," said Chapman. He would not say if Moody is such a person.

Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, and the latest in a succession of fundamental-conservative presidents, said he is not aware of "any other potential nominees" for the 1992 election but added he expects there to be some.

"I find it hard to believe there will not be other nominees," he said. "To have more than one nominee is the rule, not the exception."

Asked if Moody's candidacy might be sufficient, Chapman said, "I think that is left to the conviction of all Southern Baptists."

"I believe strongly in the democratic process, which Southern Baptists have utilized through the years, and I am confident the process will continue to work for Southern Baptists and to God's glory."

Hewett said the moderate-conservative Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has not been asked to support the Moody campaign and added he doesn't expect many Fellowship participants to get involved.

"I don't see the Fellowship buying into this," he said. "That's not the reason we formed the Fellowship."

Moody has no chance of winning the presidency against fundamental-conservative opposition, Hewett said. Nor has there been any evidence of a groundswell of support for a compromise candidate, he added.

"The reason we decided to stop investing our attention in SBC politics

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is not because we haven't had the right candidate," said Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C.

Several other moderate-conservative leaders said they will not get involved in the Moody campaign and predicted Moody will be defeated. But they said the Fellowship will be ready to receive those Southern Baptists who are discouraged by this latest political effort.

Hewett predicted "the exodus" from traditional Southern Baptist involvement will continue as more people realize "the takeover has been accomplished."

"As the fundamentalists tighten the screws," he said, "the people who leave the SBC in the next few years are going to be more wounded than those who have already left."

As for Moody's suggestion that the Fellowship disband if he wins, Hewett said, "That would require a vote of the members of the Fellowship. I have no comment on that."

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Moscow-bound missionary
never doubted calling

By Toby Druin

(ABP) -- In 1988 the dream of Mel and Nancy Skinner sounded impossible.

"I believe the Lord wants us in the Soviet Union, working in Moscow, planting churches," Skinner said in October 1988, three years before the most recent upheaval in the Soviet Union and a year before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

"I've been heading in that direction since 1980 and everything seems to be falling in place," Skinner said as he sat in the living room of the couple's apartment in Kornwestheim, then West Germany.

At the time the 1,000 miles between Germany and Moscow seemed much farther.

Skinner and his new bride were fresh out of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and had accepted the pastorate of Temple Baptist Church in Kornwestheim, a Stuttgart suburb, to gain the two years of pastoral experience required by the Foreign Mission Board for missionary appointment. They agreed to go to Germany to be nearer Eastern Europe, and Moscow.

In May of this year, the couple completed their stay in Germany, and on Aug. 13 they were among 40 new missionaries appointed by the FMB. Next January, following eight weeks of orientation in Virginia, they will go to Moscow as church planters.

Skinner, who said he first felt God calling him to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1980, said his conviction that he would get to go to Moscow didn't waver when the abortive coup was announced less than a week after their appointment.

"Honestly, it didn't," he said in a telephone interview from Thayer, Kan., where he and Nancy and their six-month-old daughter, Sarah Jean, are visiting Nancy's parents. "I believe with all my heart that the Lord wants us in Moscow," he said, adding that a coup wasn't going to get in the way.

"I don't think any of us can comprehend what it is to be in the Soviet

Union," he continued. "They have had a taste of freedom and are not about to give it up without a lot of bloodshed, and I didn't expect that to happen."

Skinner noted that last March he was given an opportunity to serve as a missionary in Germany. "I fasted and prayed," he said, "and God said, 'No, you will be going to the Soviet Union.'"

"So the coup really didn't concern me," he said.

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Experts say Soviets demonstrate
victory of freedom over fear

By Greg Warner

(ABP) A taste of freedom was enough to overcome a mountain of fear in the Soviet Union, says Soviet expert Olin Robison.

The Aug. 19-21 coup attempt by hard-line Soviet communists failed because grass-roots Soviets, after enduring decades of totalitarian rule, found freedom to their liking, say Robison and other experts.

"The principal thing that has happened is that a society governed by fear and repression for generations is finally coming into the sunshine," said Robison, a Baptist layman and former U. S. State Department official. "The people are saying, 'We're not going to live this way anymore.'"

"In the last five years, the people had lost their fear of the system," added Bill O'Brien of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. "That became the emotional and moral currency they could draw on."

The reforms of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev had "created the climate of freedom," explained O'Brien, director of the Global Center at Samford's Beeson Divinity School. As a result, O'Brien said, when Russian President Boris Yeltsin issued his call for Muscovites to go into the streets to resist the coup, "it did not go unheeded."

Robison also was impressed by the resistance mounted by Soviet citizens. "Don't underestimate the risk they put themselves under," he cautioned. "Historically, when they did that, they got shot."

Robison is former president and now a professor at Middlebury (Vt.) College. A member of First Baptist Church of Washington, D.C., he served as special assistant to the undersecretary of state during the Lyndon Johnson administration. He visits the Soviet Union two or three times a year to negotiate with Soviet officials for the student exchange program he has started.

The fact that Soviets would stare down their powerful military with no weapons sends "a strong signal" about how they value their freedom, O'Brien said. Robison agreed.

"The way the coup was turned back will almost certainly strengthen that determination and make it stronger," Robison said. "It almost has to."

Will the victory of freedom for the Soviets bring a spiritual harvest as well? Many observers think so.

"With their openness to religious faith and the loss of fear of reprisal, you have the makings of a renewal, of revival," O'Brien said.

Veda Rae Lozuk, a Southern Baptist missionary in Moscow, says the Soviets are ripe for renewal.

"I wouldn't be surprised to see a spiritual movement sweep over this

country, because people are so hungry and so thirsty for the Word of God and they've been denied the hearing of it for such a very long time," Lozuk told a Foreign Mission Board reporter by telephone from Moscow.

Lozuk and her husband, George, the son of Russian and Polish immigrants to the United States, became the first Southern Baptist missionaries to the Soviet Union earlier this year. "It's exciting to be a part of it right now," she said. "I wouldn't trade places with anyone."

According to Lozuk, freedom has so taken root in the Soviet Union in recent years that there is no turning back. "There is the freedom to organize churches. There is the freedom to worship."

Robison was more cautious about predicting the future of Soviet religion after the failed coup. "I don't think it's possible to say with any precision what it will mean for religious communities," he said. "But all the things that have happened in the past week suggest it's going to be a society with much greater pluralism."

"I do have the sense that Baptists are flourishing in the Soviet Union," he added. And the events of the past week offer Baptists "the promise of uninhibited growth."

Both Robison and FMB vice president Iram Ballenger agreed the greatest promise for spiritual advance is in the Baltic republics and the Ukraine. Less religious freedom might await in the Asian republics, where Islam has a strong hold.

"If the republics come to have authority over church relations, then there could be several developments, some of them good and some of them bad," said Ballenger, the FMB's vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. "It could be disadvantageous (for Christians) in the Islamic republics."

In those parts of the Soviet Union where the Russian Orthodox Church is dominant, there will be other tests of the newfound freedoms, Robison said. "It's going to mean the Russian Orthodox hierarchy is going to have to be more tolerant of other religious groups than they have been historically," he said.

The vastness and ethnic complexity of the Soviet Union has fostered some fears that religious persecution will arise on a regional level. But Robison said he doesn't see that as a proven threat. "It's possible," he said, "but I don't see there is any reason at the moment to predict that will happen."

But he added, "The rise of all manner of ethnic difficulties and conflicts, and the degree to which those...ethnic groups see their religion as central to their identity, (will mean) that anybody who is not a part of the group is going to be in a bad way."

Is communism dead in the U.S.S.R.? On this question, too, many are cautious.

"It's too early to say," noted O'Brien. "I wouldn't want to say it's the last gasp for communism."

But he likened the events of the past week to "the sound you get when you are sucking on a straw and you come to the end of your chocolate soda. It may be the dying gasp (for communism), but there might be enough bubbles down there to make some noise."

The manner in which the coup leaders underestimated the will of the Soviet people "reflects the ultimate blindness the hard core had," O'Brien said. "Once you succumb to ideological blindness, then you're not able to listen to reason."

O'Brien said the upheaval in the Soviet Union can teach American

Christians something about the urgency of sharing the gospel and the character of Christians overseas.

Although Southern Baptists and others have been encouraged by the growing openness in the Soviet Union, the swiftness of change should be sobering, O'Brien explained.

"It is a sharp reminder that we don't have any lease on life anywhere in world," he said. "Nothing is automatic. We can't count on anything."

American Christians also can learn to trust the experience and leadership of Christians in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe who have weathered years of communist rule.

"What can we learn from them?" O'Brien asked. "Do we really have that much to offer, aside from dollars and a shared gospel?"

"We need a stewardship of opportunity to share the gospel but also a sensitivity to the circumstances out of which (the Soviets) are living," he concluded.

Christians who have been anxious to see spiritual renewal in the Soviet Union should take cautious note of recent events, he said. "We should stand in awe of the sovereignty of God and not rush in where angels fear to tread."

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'Divorce' urged in marriage
of sports and alcohol

By Teresa Dickens

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Could a nearly two-decade-old marriage between sports and the alcohol industry end in divorce? Probably not, most observers say. But the relationship isn't free of the threat.

Rocking the boat in this lucrative marriage between two of America's favorite pastimes is a band of public-interest groups. Their battle cry is that the alcohol industry's sponsorship of professional and collegiate sporting events sends the false message that drinking goes hand in hand with sports.

They propose that eliminating, or at least restricting, such advertisement would go a long way in curbing the abuse of alcohol in America.

The marriage between sports and alcohol is undeniable. In 1990, beer companies spent \$133 million on sponsorship of athletic events, according to Special Events Report, a biweekly trade newsletter.

St. Louis-based Anheuser-Busch Co. put up \$44 million of the total, followed by Miller Brewing Co. with \$12 million.

A newsletter published by the Center for Science in the Public Interest reported that Anheuser-Busch "helps finance all major league baseball teams, 20 of 28 NFL teams, more than 300 college teams and about 1,000 other sporting events. The company buys radio and TV ads, ballpark billboards, merchandising tie-ins and other promotions."

But sponsorship is not the only thing that bothers public-interest groups such as CSPI. Pat Taylor, director of the alcohol-policies projects for the center, said the use of sports personalities in advertisements also is a problem.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms prohibits active athletes

from appearing in alcoholic-beverage advertisements. But, Taylor said, "We plan to ask them to extend that to retired athletes as well."

A new concern, she said, is the growing presence of the alcohol industry within the actual sporting events. With such features as the Budweiser scoreboard, alcohol advertisers are framing the events themselves as advertisements, she said.

"These kinds of advertisements integrate active athletes with beer advertising," Taylor told the Word and Way, newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention. "We are going to be asking that these kinds of practices no longer be allowed.

"You are watching a game," she explained, "and the Budweiser thing flashes over your kid's favorite baseball player because he's just hit a home run." That communicates to the child that his favorite player prefers Budweiser, she suggested.

The impact of alcohol advertising on children and youth is one of the greatest concerns CSPI has, Taylor said. The use of favorite sports figures, animated commercials and pets entices young people and paints the picture that drinking makes people athletic and results in a lot of fun, she said.

"By the time a youngster is old enough to drink, he or she has seen 90,000 incidents of drinking on TV," Taylor said.

A 1990 survey, financed by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, documents the impact of alcohol advertisements on children. Interviews with 468 randomly selected children in the fifth grade revealed that 44 percent thought beer commercials encouraged them to drink. Some 88 percent of the youngsters identified Spuds MacKenzie with Bud Light, while only one ninth as many matched Coca-Cola to its slogan.

Robert Parham, director of the new Baptist Center for Ethics, said the best way to judge the impact of promotion of alcohol on young people is to study the results: an estimated 4.5 million young people are problem drinkers; half of all teenage suicides, homicides and drownings are alcohol-related; 8,000 young Americans die in traffic accidents every year; alcoholism on college campuses costs institutions thousands each year and leads to property destruction, academic problems and sexual violence.

"Alcohol ads push and pull young Americans to drink," said Parham, former associate director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "Yet these ads offer no information about 'when to say when' to stop drinking. They provide no information about the illegal nature of alcohol consumption for those under age 21. They say nothing about the danger of drinking during pregnancy. They remain silent about the possibility of addiction.

"Our nation would never tolerate such misleading ads about cocaine," he declared. "Why do we tolerate such distortions from the alcohol industry?"

"The sports world, professional and collegiate, has taken a very tough stand against the use of illegal drugs such as cocaine and steroids," he added. "But when it comes to the issue of alcohol, they take a rather passive position. That is understandable since so much of their revenue comes from alcohol-based advertisements."

And money may very well be what keeps this marriage intact. While beer companies spend millions in sponsorships of athletic events, they make even more. An estimated 2 percent of all beer sold in the U.S. is bought at stadiums and arenas.

According to a recent article in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch,

Anheuser-Busch, since charging into sports advertising in 1977, has more than doubled its share of the U.S. beer market -- from 22 percent to 46 percent.

But brewers aren't the only ones who would suffer if a rift in the marriage occurred. For example, a new restriction that all beer sales must stop during the seventh inning already has cost the San Francisco Giants \$600,000 in net revenue. St. Louis Cardinals officials have not calculated their losses based on the same restriction, the Post-Dispatch reported.

Networks and cable TV also would suffer, leading to either cancellation of some televised sports events, such as the Golden Gloves, or more pay-per-view channels.

If public-interest groups are successful in getting more restrictions on this type of advertising and sponsorships, it will not be an easy victory. A research manager for Special Events Reports predicted, "For every self-interest group trying to get alcohol out of sports, the brewers have hundreds of lobbyists working."

As for the brewers, they resent the accusation that there is something "inherently wrong about drinking beer." Mike Roarty, an executive vice president at Anheuser-Busch, remarked, "Beer is not a problem itself. Alcohol abuse is the problem. We do not preach alcohol abuse. It comes down to individual responsibility."

The brewers also point to their "responsible messages" -- ads that discourage alcohol abuse -- as part of their defense against charges from groups like CSPI.

"Have you thought about what Spuds MacKenzie telling your 10-year-old to 'Know when to say when' really means?" countered Taylor. "First, your child is getting a pro-drinking message. 'Know when to say when' assumes that someone has started drinking and the only question that needs to be answered is, how much? There is certainly no information about the fact it is illegal for your 10-year-old to purchase alcoholic beverages before reaching the age of 21, or that alcohol is a drink which can be deadly.

"There is no way these 'responsible messages' can compete with the amount of advertising beer companies do," she concluded.

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-- Teresa Dickens is a news writer for the Word and Way of Missouri.

Curbing alcohol in sports:
What can Baptists do?

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- What can Southern Baptists do to help curb the alcohol industry's influence on sporting events? Legislation and education are two avenues of influence named by Southern Baptist leaders.

Robert Parham, director of the new Baptist Center for Ethics, urged Baptists to support two pieces of legislation currently being considered by the U.S. Congress. They are House Resolution 1443, known as "The Sensible Advertising and Family Education Act," and Senate Bill 664, the "Alcohol Beverage Advertising Act."

If enacted, the bills would require that health warnings appear at the end of all broadcast commercials and on all print advertisements for alcoholic beverages, Parham said. The five rotating warnings include messages about avoiding alcohol during pregnancy and when using other

drugs, that drinking impairs one's ability to operate motor vehicles, that alcohol may be addictive, and that drinking is illegal for individuals under the age of 21.

"The bill is overdue and urgently needed," said Parham. "Alcohol is the nation's No. 1 drug problem. It is a gateway drug for the nation's youth. In fact, it is their drug of choice.

"The warnings would impact those who drink the most beer and are more vulnerable to its adverse effects, that population being young males between the ages of 18 and 24," he added. "They represent the greatest portion of beer drinkers and are the most avid sports enthusiasts.

"Clearly, the warnings will strip the alcohol ads of the fantasy and misinformation that they sell," he said.

Concerning education, Baptists must be taught about the effects of drinking, said Greg Fiebig, director of development for the Christian Civic Foundation, a Missouri-based multid denominational agency that combats alcohol abuse.

Referring to a 1985 Gallup poll which found that 45 percent of Southern Baptists drink alcohol, Fiebig said, "When we start working with churches and individuals, we have to first educate them on what the effects of alcohol are on the system."

The root problem of alcohol abuse involves the inability of people "to deal with problems, poor self-esteem and inability to communicate effectively with one another," said Fiebig.

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Arab Baptist pastor
denied entry to Israel

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Arab Baptist pastor Alex Awad again has been denied a permanent visa and work permit to serve a Palestinian church in the West Bank of Israel.

Awad, an ordained Southern Baptist minister, has petitioned the Israeli government for more than two years to obtain a visa so he can return to his homeland and serve as pastor of East Jerusalem Baptist Church. He also wants to teach at Bethlehem Bible College.

Israeli officials did not give a reason for the latest rejection.

At the request of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, the Baptist Joint Committee has been working nearly two years to help Awad secure his visa.

Awad said: "Part of my sadness is that their rejection does not serve anybody -- not even the Israeli government. It will not promote peace and justice in the world. It's an act of discrimination."

"We are crestfallen at the news," said Brent Walker, BJC associate general counsel. "There was simply no good reason for the Israeli government to turn him down. Alex had no hidden political agenda. He just wanted to pastor a local church in East Jerusalem.

"It's hard to imagine a more egregious violation of religious liberty," he continued, "than to keep a congregation from calling a pastor whom it believes God has ordained to be its leader."

Walker has written numerous letters to government officials and religious leaders, soliciting support for Awad. Walker helped secure support from Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., and Rep. Ed Jenkins, D-Ga. Jerry Vines, then-president of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote a letter to

the Israeli embassy at Walker's request.

Walker also has met with officials, including Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek on Awad's behalf.

Awad, 45, was born in Jerusalem and spent more than 10 years in the United States, becoming an American citizen. He attended Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., for one semester. He was ordained to the gospel ministry by First Baptist Church in Ellijay, Ga. In 1977, Awad became pastor of Clayton Baptist Church, Canton, Ga.

In 1979, he returned to Israel to become dean of students at Bethlehem Bible College and worked among Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem until 1987.

In 1987, the Israeli authorities refused to renew work visas for Awad and his wife, Brenda, saying that they had allowed lapses in their visas. So they returned to the United States.

Awad said they did not purposefully violate visa regulations but were victims of government policy that made it difficult to maintain current visas.

In 1988, the East Jerusalem Baptist Church called him as pastor. He traveled there on a temporary tourist visa to iron out details. The Israeli government would not renew his visa and requested he return to the United States and reapply.

Since then, he formally has applied twice.

Awad said he is calling on the Israeli government to reconsider its decision. His ministry in Israel would have been undergirded by the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. Because of the visa complications, Awad has begun to consider possible reassignment to another mission post.

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-- By Pam Parry

Proposed child-care rule said
to pose church-state threat

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The child-care regulations proposed by the federal government raise serious church-state questions, according to the Baptist Joint Committee.

The BJC filed comments Aug. 23 on the proposed rule for the Aid to Families with Dependent Children At-Risk Child Care Program.

The proposed rule to implement the program was published to allow at least 30 days for public comment. After the comments are processed, the final rule will be published.

While the program would help provide child care for low-income families, the proposed regulations to implement it "do not contain any safeguards to require or even encourage compliance with the establishment clause of the First Amendment," the BJC comments said.

A broad provision of the rule would allow a state to grant money directly to a church day-care center without any restriction on sectarian activities, the BJC said. For example, a church day-care center could receive direct government aid and still offer religious worship and instruction to the children placed in its care.

Religious organizations provide about one-third of the nation's child-

care services.

The BJC also expressed concern that the proposed rule would allow states to contract with religious organizations to perform administrative functions required by the program.

The BJC comments suggest the final rule include a provision that churches receiving direct aid may provide "no religious instruction or counseling, conduct no religious worship or services, engage in no religious proselytizing, and exert no other religious influence" in providing child care.

"If aid to parochial schools is bad, aid to parochial preschools is worse," said Oliver Thomas, BJC general counsel. "Government has no business subsidizing religious indoctrination, and without the restrictions we have proposed, this program does precisely that."

The BJC also filed comments Aug. 23 on the proposed rule for the Aliens in Religious Occupations provisions of the Immigration Act of 1990. The rule gives procedures for admission to the United States of non-immigrant or temporary religious workers. Religious workers may stay in the states for up to five years under the law.

The BJC raised concerns that the rule would accommodate hierarchical churches but not those with congregational polity, such as Baptists.

The BJC noted that to comply with the rule's definition, a religious denomination must have a "recognized creed and form of worship, a formal code of doctrine and discipline."

"Baptists, along with many other denominations, pride themselves on being 'non-creedal.' That is to say, we do not have specific creeds that set forth our tenets of belief; rather, we look to the Bible generally to set forth our doctrinal position," the comments said.

The BJC also pointed out there is no single recognized form of worship common to all Baptists.

"Thus, under the definition of 'religious denomination' in the proposed rule, the largest Protestant denomination in the country arguably is not a 'denomination' within the meaning of the immigration law."

The BJC called for an expansive definition: "Religious denomination means a religious group or community of believers having some form or forms of ecclesiastical government, worship and religious practice."

The BJC also raised concerns about language defining affiliation with a church and relating to the professional religious worker.

In another matter, the U.S. Department of Justice recently responded to comments filed by the BJC in March on the proposed rule for the Americans with Disabilities Act. The 1990 act provides persons with disabilities protections in several areas, including public accommodations. Churches, however, are exempt from having to meet these obligations, such as installing elevators for handicapped persons.

Although the act exempts churches, the proposed regulations were subject to the misinterpretation that the act applies to any religious entity that makes its facilities available to the Boy Scouts, Alcoholics Anonymous or other groups open to the general public.

The Justice Department conceded the religious entity exemption should be interpreted broadly and assured the BJC that churches that make their facilities available to such community groups will continue to be exempt.

Women in Ministry
hires administrator

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Southern Baptist Women in Ministry has named an administrator-editor and announced plans for a fall retreat.

Mary Zimmer, a recent graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., has been named the organization's administrator and editor of Folio, its quarterly newsletter. This is a newly created position approved at the organization's annual meeting last June.

In addition to her administrative functions, Zimmer will be responsible for networking among more than 800 women ordained to ministry by Southern Baptist churches nationwide.

Zimmer announced the Louisville-based organization will hold its first retreat Nov. 7-9 in Nashville, Tenn. Theme for the retreat is "Proclamation: Our Lives as Living Word."

Zimmer will lead the program, which will focus on proclamation in the lives of five biblical women. Worship leaders are Sarah Frances Anders, professor of sociology at Louisiana College in Pineville; Carolyn Hale, dean of student life at Georgetown College; and Cindy Harp Johnson, a chaplain from Gaithersburg, Md.

Registration information is available from Southern Baptist Women in Ministry at 2800 Frankfort Ave., Louisville, Ky. 40206 (502) 896-4425.

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CLARIFICATION: At the request of the CLC's Michael Whitehead, please add the following after paragraph 13 in the story "CLC's agenda, budget... (Aug. 22).

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Soon after returning to Missouri, Whitehead's 13-year-old son, Jonathan, was diagnosed with leukemia. Whitehead told Associated Baptist Press he asked to stay longer in Kansas City because of Jonathan's illness, and he asked Southern Baptists to pray for his son, whom he said is responding to treatment.
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CORRECTION: In the story "Criswell researcher..." (Aug. 22), please correct the spelling of Ninomiya. After finally reaching Ninomiya, we learned the correct spelling. By the way, he is 36 and a native of Hawaii.

***** END *****