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NOTICE: Associated Baptist Press does not plan to publish its regular Thursday issue either Dec. 26 or Jan. 2. However, we will monitor events and issue stories as needed during that time. Thank you for your support of ABP during 1991.

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Committee to sue Furman hopes  
for out-of-court settlement

By Don Kirkland

COLUMBIA, S.C. (ABP) -- A seven-member committee of South Carolina Baptists has been appointed to pursue a legal judgment against Furman University, but officials held out some hope for an out-of-court settlement.

Furman, which is affiliated with the South Carolina Baptist Convention, acted in 1990 to make its board of trustees self-perpetuating, angering many South Carolina Baptists. The state convention voted in November to pursue a declaratory judgment against the school.

But Gregory Horton, the outgoing president of the state convention who appointed the committee, said each committee member has agreed to "do everything possible" to avert a court battle.

Accompanied by new convention president Eddie Greene of Anderson, Horton, a layman from Simpsonville, announced the committee names at a press conference Dec. 17 at the Baptist Building in Columbia.

"Each one (of the committee members) has told me he is not anti-Furman and has no axe to grind with anyone in this matter," Horton said.

The committee, which was authorized by a close vote of messengers to the Nov. 11-12 state convention in Greenville, includes four laymen, two pastors and a retired pastor.

However, the committee's makeup did not please Furman University president John E. Johns, who in a prepared statement declared his disappointment "that the past president of the South Carolina Baptist Convention would appoint a committee that is composed primarily of fundamentalists who are openly hostile to Furman."

"I was certainly surprised," he continued, "to see that he had appointed the individual who made the substitute motion to sue Furman at the convention, as well as the Furman trustee who seconded the motion."

Johns was referring to committee members George Campsen III from Mt. Pleasant, who offered the motion seeking the declaratory judgment, and Guy Sanders Jr. from Bamberg, also a layman, who served on the Furman board through 1993.

Also on the committee are Arthur Bruce, layman from Anderson; Redmond Coyle, layman from Pickens; Troy Gregg, pastor of First Baptist Church in Chesnee; Timothy Head, pastor of Cooper River Baptist Church in Charleston; and Bruce Russell, a retired minister from Charleston.

Horton said no deadline has been set for any action by the committee, which will choose its own chairman.

The former convention president also emphasized that so far "no money" had been spent by the convention for litigation.

The prospect of using offering-plate money for a court action has, however, triggered protests from many South Carolina Baptists. At least four churches have voted to withhold Cooperative Program money to prevent its being used for the lawsuit.

Furman's 1991 allocation of Cooperative Program money -- \$1.6 million -- is being held in an interest-bearing account. The 1992 allocation of \$1.8 million also will be escrowed in that account.

Campsen's substitute motion, which passed by a vote of 2,111 to 1,973, stipulated that court costs be paid with money designated for Furman. The committee will use the interest money earned on the Furman funds in escrow.

Messengers to the state convention never voted on a covenant reached between Furman's executive board and a special convention committee allowing the convention to choose Furman trustees from a list already approved by Furman.

Horton insisted his hope for an out-of-court settlement was not a "step back" from the convention's action in November to pursue the declaratory judgment.

Asked whether the seven-member committee had legal authority to instigate a court action, Horton said that would have to be determined.

Greene also issued a call for reconciliation. "We need to talk," he said. The new convention president, a conservative who characterizes himself as a reconciler, said, "The rank-and-file South Carolina Baptists do not want a lawsuit, and we've heard them loud and clear."

"I'm extending a hand to Furman," Greene said, "And I'm waiting for a hand in return."

Johns restated his hope that "this matter could be settled out of court."

"But," he continued, "it seems apparent that this committee is composed of people who favor legal action. Although we're disappointed in the makeup of this committee, we continue to be willing to talk with responsible groups representing the convention until a lawsuit is filed."

Baptist minister, space buff  
files presidential candidacy

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP)--Pledging to fulfill the biblical mandate to "subdue the universe" through outer-space exploration, former First Baptist Church of Dallas staff member Rufus Higginbotham officially declared on Dec. 17 his desire to become the next President of the United States.

Citing Genesis 1:8 and Psalm 8 as his inspiration and world peace as his goal, Higginbotham, 59, will run on the Democratic ticket in the New Hampshire primary next February.

"After seeing the (Democratic candidates') debate...I've decided that I'm not going to try to outdo them or continue stirring the same old pot. Instead, our campaign involves a completely different pot," according to a prepared statement Higginbotham released to the press.

"We see a new era of godly purpose beyond our planet, in which all of us, as members of a race isolated on a blue ball in a universe, can be united as fellow sojourners."

Higginbotham said his platform is to make the United States the leader of a global economic partnership to "take dominion" of outer space. The U.S. would provide the technical expertise, and other nations would supply the funding.

"The other countries would gladly join us because they are eager to become a part of such a peaceful, global, meaningful, godly enterprise," he explained.

The quest to explore space would give humankind a common purpose, would create jobs for the poor worldwide and would lead to "spin-off" benefits through research and development.

Higginbotham told ABP the key to his campaign lies in a hoped-for meeting with Saddam Hussein in Baghdad. Rather than driving Saddam from power, Higginbotham said he wants to offer the Iraqi tyrant a visionary goal that would inspire him to work with other world leaders.

"I believe he would be open to such a partnership. He has the same God of Abraham that we do," he said.

Higginbotham said he is attempting to contact the Iraqi delegation to the United Nations to arrange the meeting "as soon as possible." Rather than waiting for the election, Higginbotham wants to pursue actively his goal of world peace while still a presidential hopeful.

An ordained Baptist minister, Higginbotham holds degrees from Southern Methodist University and SMU Law School in Dallas and from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force.

For several years, he led a ministry to the homeless sponsored by First Baptist Church of Dallas. He said that W. A. Criswell, longtime pastor of the church and Higginbotham's work-out partner at the downtown YMCA, convinced him to seek public office.

Previously, Higginbotham has run for the Dallas City Council, the Texas Legislature, the Third Congressional District and, most recently, mayor of Dallas.

His platform in the mayoral race was virtually identical to his presidential goals, but of the more than 157,000 votes cast on Nov. 5, Higginbotham received only 813. Nevertheless, he believes his dream will be better received at the national level.

"People couldn't relate to ways that the mayor of Dallas could lead a global economic coalition, but they can see how the president could do that," he said.

His letterhead reads "Higginbotham for President Ministry-Campaign,"

and the space enthusiast definitely sees the missionary possibilities of space exploration. Life on other planets is "not beyond the scope of the Bible," he asserted.

"I've been riding Dr. Criswell, telling him that there needs to be a new edition of the Criswell Study Bible noting that 'Go ye into all the world' could just as well mean, 'Go ye into all the universe,'" he said.

"When we do that -- going to all the universe -- we may end up with converts on other planets. The Lord only knows."

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Gunman murders four in Missouri;  
suspect is active Baptist layman

By Trennis Henderson

CALIFORNIA, Mo. (ABP) -- It was not a "typical" mass murder. The gunman shot five victims with sniper-like precision in four different locations. He later surrendered to law enforcement officers without incident. The suspect is a Missouri Baptist layman.

James Johnson of Jamestown, Mo., was charged Dec. 11 with four counts of first-degree murder and one count of felony assault. He is accused of killing a sheriff, a sheriff's wife and two deputies, and of wounding a third deputy.

The attacks began when Moniteau County sheriff's deputy Les Roark responded to a domestic-disturbance call at Johnson's home around 7:30 p.m. Dec. 9. Roark, 27, was shot by the gunman and died the following morning.

An hour after the first shooting, Pam Jones was shot in her home in Clarksburg where she was hosting a group of friends from First Christian Church in California. According to Missouri Highway Patrol officials, she was shot through a window and was pronounced dead later that night at a Columbia hospital.

Jones, 38, was the wife of Moniteau County sheriff Kenny Jones. She also was a high school teacher in Jamestown, where Johnson's stepdaughter is a student.

Later, shortly after 1 a.m. the following morning, Moniteau County deputy Russell Borts returned to his home near the county jail after investigating the second shooting. Borts was shot three times after he entered his home. He is listed in serious condition at a Columbia hospital.

Law officers at the county jail who heard those shots fired left the jail to investigate. Cooper County sheriff Charles Smith, 54, and Miller County deputy Sandra Wilson, 42, were shot and killed outside the jail.

Following a daylong manhunt involving more than 150 officers, Johnson surrendered Tuesday night in a California home located a few blocks from the sites of the final three shootings. He was formally charged with the crimes the following day. He currently is being held in the Cole County Jail in Jefferson City.

Possible motives for the shootings center around domestic problems and Johnson's relationship to his 17-year-old stepdaughter. Johnson's apparent decision specifically to target law enforcement officers may be linked to their efforts to intervene in the family's domestic disputes.

Johnson, a member of Salem Baptist Church near California, has been described by friends as "normal," "sociable" and "easy-going."

According to Lt. Ernie McCutchen, director of the Missouri Highway Patrol's personnel division, negotiators talked with Johnson by telephone for more than an hour before he surrendered.

McCutchen, who is a member of Concord Baptist Church in Jefferson City,

said: "During the telephone conversation, we attempted to calm him down and give him a choice of coming out without anyone getting hurt, himself included. I think probably at that time, he had several hours to reflect on what he had done, and I think there was a bit of remorse there. Probably initially something snapped and he was not in control of himself."

Loren Belt, pastor of Salem Church, said, "I'm just very shocked and don't know what caused it," noting that Johnson was "fairly active" in church participation.

Irene Blix, a secretary at the Missouri Baptist Convention, is a member of New Hope Baptist Church where Johnson attended a few years ago. Blix said Johnson "was as neat a guy as you'll ever meet. You talk to any of our people and they just love him."

Seeking to come to terms with the tragedy, Blix said, "We're all just sick about it. We can't understand how it happened because we knew him as a neighbor and never saw that side of him. This was so out of character for the Jim Johnson we had known before."

Steven Dull is pastor of Main Street Church, where Johnson's parents are members. Dull was at the Moniteau County Jail with Johnson's wife and stepdaughter when three officers were shot near the jail early Tuesday morning.

"I was requested to come to the jail because I knew the family," Dull explained. "Since I was the only minister on the scene, I just took on the role of ministering to as many people as I could, first of all staying with the wife and the daughter and also counseling and talking with some of the officers after the shooting there at the jail."

Since Johnson's arrest, Dull has had opportunity to minister to Johnson's parents and to accompany them on a visit to Johnson.

"The parents, of course, were distraught," Dull said. "They were extremely upset and asking the typical questions of why. It's hard on them, but they are seeking to cope through their faith in God."

When they visited Johnson two days after his arrest, Johnson's parents took their son's Bible to him, Dull said. "When we gave it to him, he said his Bible was one of the things he wanted most of all," Dull recalled.

During Wednesday evening prayer services at New Hope Church the day after Johnson's arrest, "we had special prayer not only for the family of Jim Johnson but for the families who lost loved ones," Blix said.

"All we can talk about is the Jim we knew before this happened," she added. "God can forgive what man can't. And we are praying that Jim will find peace with God."

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Family, friends of victims  
face loss of loved ones

CALIFORNIA, Mo. (ABP) -- The public ordeal officially ended at 6:46 p.m. on Dec. 10 when law enforcement officers took murder suspect James Johnson into custody. But the private ordeals have barely begun for the families and friends of the four murder victims.

After the shootings began in Moniteau County on the evening of Dec. 9, the gunman virtually held the entire area hostage for the next 23 hours. Police set up 11 roadblocks in and around the mid-Missouri community of California. Schools and businesses were closed, and few people ventured outside until they heard the news of Johnson's arrest.

During the deadly rampage, Moniteau County deputy Les Roark, Moniteau County sheriff's wife Pam Jones, Cooper County sheriff Charles Smith and Miller County deputy Sandra Wilson were killed. Moniteau County deputy

Russell Borts was shot three times and remains hospitalized in Columbia.

The murder of Jones, a high school teacher and mother of four children ages 7-15, appeared to spark the greatest shock and anger among area residents.

Lt. Christian Ricks, a Missouri Highway Patrol spokesman, worked on one of the roadblocks during the manhunt for Johnson. "In many of the cars we stopped, when we would explain the situation to them, many would just start crying right there," he said. "They would talk about what a wonderful person Pam Jones was. She was an individual who was loved by the community."

Rowena Oppermann, a secretary at the Missouri Baptist Convention, was a longtime friend of Jones. "Pam was a person who sought to make the world better," Oppermann reflected. "She felt strongly in her belief about making the world a better place, especially for children."

Oppermann, whose husband is a Highway Patrol corporal who was involved in the manhunt, said she was "devastated" by the news of her friend's death. "I was in shock that it had happened," she said. "It was a reminder that life is so fragile. You just don't know when your last day or moment will be."

Among the other murder victims: Charles Smith had served as Cooper County sheriff since 1984. Survivors include his wife, Betty, and two grown children. Les Roark, who was single, served two years as a reserve deputy and worked full-time as a computer programmer. Sandra Wilson, who was the only female deputy in Miller County, is survived by her husband, Robert, and two children.

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Anita Bryant begins comeback  
after decade of isolation

By Dana Williamson

BERRYVILLE, Ark. (ABP) -- Eleven years after a painful divorce and the collapse of her entertainment career, Anita Bryant is coming back into the public spotlight with a new book.

"A New Day," Bryant's first book in more than a decade, is scheduled for release in the spring of 1992 by Broadman Press. The book is said to focus on God's redemptive work in Bryant's life.

Bryant's criticism of homosexuals cost her an advertising contract with the Florida Citrus Commission, and her subsequent divorce alienated her from many in the Christian community.

Bryant's career began in 1959, when she was named second runner-up in the Miss America Pageant. She recorded 30 albums and wrote 10 books. She had a \$100,000-a-year advertising contract with the Florida Citrus Commission and three times was voted Good Housekeeping's Most Admired Woman.

She did 14 command performances at the White House, sang at the funeral of President Lyndon Johnson and traveled on seven consecutive Bob Hope Christmas tours.

Married for 20 years to a one-time teen idol Bob Green, the mother of four children and a Sunday school teacher in a Southern Baptist church, it seemed the former beauty queen was living in a dream world. However, that dream world turned into a nightmare when Bryant went through a bitter and public divorce in 1980.

"That's the time when you find out who your real friends are," Bryant said in an interview with the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger.

After the divorce, Bryant returned to Oklahoma, her home state.

"I never planned to go public again," she recalled. "I wanted to die. But God, like a big daddy, had me in his arms. It took a long time for healing to begin, and it took years before the healing was complete."

Bryant became a Southern Baptist when her family moved to Midwest City, Okla., when she was 12 years old. However, her singing debut had come at age 2 in First Baptist Church of Barnsdale, Okla.

Bryant wanted to attend Oklahoma Baptist University but didn't have the money. Friends encouraged her to enter the Miss Tulsa Pageant so she might win a scholarship.

She won the Miss Tulsa and Miss Oklahoma titles, and as an 18-year-old became one of the youngest contestants in the Miss America Pageant.

Instead of going to OBU, Bryant was swept almost immediately into the public spotlight with her first million-selling song, "Till There Was You." By 20, she had two more million-sellers, "Paper Roses" and "My Little Corner of the World."

Throughout her successful career, Bryant remained active in a Southern Baptist church and frequently shared her Christian testimony.

That made it extremely painful for her when she felt Christians turning against her after her divorce. "One lady came up to me in a shopping mall and told me she was sorry she ever prayed for me," Bryant recalled.

During 10 years of isolation, Bryant moved from Oklahoma to Selma, Ala., then to Atlanta and was preparing to move to Nashville when she got a call from Charlie Dry.

Bryant and Dry had met in Oklahoma when she was 9 and he was 10. He delivered groceries from his parents' store to her grandparents' home. They became good friends and stayed in contact through the years, although each went different ways.

Dry, who had been an astronaut test crewman for 18 years, called because he needed help with a children's program. When the two childhood friends got together again, their friendship blossomed into love and they married in 1990.

About then, they decided it was time for Bryant to resume her career as an entertainer. They settled on Eureka Springs, Ark., as a good place to begin and moved to nearby Berryville.

Eureka Springs is a popular vacation spot that draws 1 million people annually, 72 percent of them age 55 or older and many Christians.

"All that totals to people who remember Anita Bryant," Dry explained.

During peak tourist season, Bryant gives six live performances a week of "The Anita Bryant Show." She is the center of the two-hour stage show, performing all but the opening number. She sings, jitterbugs, twists and talks about her experiences.

The show includes gospel renditions of "Amazing Grace" and "Jesus Loves Me" and Bryant's own testimony about God's love.

"God loves you," she tells the audience. "If it weren't for his unconditional love, I wouldn't be here."

She prays with members of the audience who come to her with problems after the show, and she quotes Scripture freely.

In her performances, as in her upcoming book, Bryant hopes to help people "who have blown it for whatever reason," she said.

"The hardest thing for me was to forgive myself. But when you give everything to God, it is a new day."

Southern Baptists mulling  
the principle of autonomy

By Trennis Henderson

(ABP) -- Autonomy is a cherished Southern Baptist hallmark. The term, which means "self-government," is found throughout Southern Baptist documents.

But how central is autonomy in modern Southern Baptist life?

A variety of issues at both the national and state levels may be answering that question.

-- Affiliation. What makes a church Southern Baptist? Is it doctrine, financial support of Southern Baptist Convention causes, or some other measure? And, most important to the discussion of autonomy, who decides? That issue of affiliation was debated in at least four states during annual fall conventions -- in Kentucky, Virginia, California and Maryland/Delaware. Even the SBC Executive Committee has flirted with the issue on occasion, although as yet it has resisted attempts to redefine denominational participation.

-- Missions funding. Many of the debates over affiliation boil down to money. Specifically, should a church's decisions about funding missions be used to qualify or exclude the congregation from participation in a state or national convention? With the growth of alternate-funding plans, such as the one developed by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the issue of missions funding has taken center stage in Baptist life. Baptists in several states will decide whether or not to allow churches that do not support the SBC's national Cooperative Program budget to participate fully in state denominational affairs.

-- Mission partnerships. The two-month debate over Southern Baptist funding of the European seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, focused on cooperation between two autonomous Baptist bodies -- the Southern Baptist Convention and the European Baptist Federation. As one EBF official phrased it: How much theological agreement is necessary before two groups can work together?

When debate surfaces on each of these topics -- as well as on the ordination of women and other issues -- someone usually invokes autonomy in defense of his or her position.

Autonomy, particularly in reference to the local Baptist church, is a time-honored principle. But what does it mean in practice?

"The Baptist Faith and Message" statement, adopted by Southern Baptist Convention messengers in 1963, describes a New Testament church as "an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ."

But autonomy is not limited to local congregations. Southern Baptist associations, state conventions and the national convention are equally autonomous.

The 1991 Southern Baptist Handbook points out that "a specific church's relationship to an association, a state convention or the SBC is determined solely by each of those respective autonomous bodies."

The Southern Baptist Convention constitution declares, "While independent and sovereign in its own sphere, the convention does not claim and will never attempt to exercise any authority over any other Baptist body, whether church, auxiliary organizations, associations or convention."

But cooperation also is a key Southern Baptist principle. The task of maintaining an effective balance between autonomy and cooperation is an ongoing challenge for Baptists.

"There is a need to distinguish between appropriate influence and inappropriate influence between Baptist bodies," said Wally Jones, pastor of Fee Fee Baptist Church in Bridgeton, Mo.

"It's certainly appropriate for churches, associations and state and national bodies to be influenced by each other in an appropriate way," said Jones, a former Missouri Baptist president. "But it's wrong for us to say that one has a right to direct the affairs of the other. Within our polity, a body really only has authority over itself."

To allow the actions of one Baptist body to be used "to manipulate the actions of another body" would lead to "the danger of setting up a hierarchical system," warned Jones, who currently serves on the SBC Executive Committee.

The issue of autonomy surfaced among Missouri Baptists earlier this year, when they debated state convention funding of the Baptist Joint Committee, a Washington-based religious-liberty organization.

Those who opposed spending Missouri Baptist money for the BJC pointed out the national SBC already had deleted its funding of the controversial organization. For Missouri Baptists to restore some of the money would be like "smacking the Southern Baptist Convention in the face," argued Gerald Davidson.

Supporters of the funding, however, argued that autonomy gave Missouri Baptists the right to differ with their national brethren.

Eventually the BJC funds were deleted during the state convention meeting. But the debate over autonomy continues.

Former SBC president Jimmy Draper, who now is president of the Baptist Sunday School Board, agreed that autonomy is a vital Southern Baptist principle. He added, however, that autonomy "has to be tempered with what is best for the whole."

"We have always denied connectionalism," Draper said. "Yet in practice, the various entities of Southern Baptist life are pretty closely related. While we're not organically bound, so that the actions of one don't dictate the actions of another, there is a lot of practical involvement that we have enjoyed over the years."

Alluding to disgruntled groups within the SBC, such as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which are exercising their autonomy at the expense of traditional channels of cooperation, Draper cautioned, "You can tear down something overnight that it takes years to build."

Affirming his belief in "cooperation as a principle of ministry," Draper said controversy within the SBC "is beginning to splinter the unquestioned crossover support that we've had."

"I'm concerned that we now have come to where some are feeling they need to choose whether to cooperate," Draper continued. "I still feel there is so much more to keep us together than to push us apart."

Even with Southern Baptists' historic commitment to cooperation, Missouri executive director Don Wideman warned that cooperation must not be equated with conformity.

"With the advent of the Cooperative Program (in 1925), there has been such an emphasis on cooperation that, in practice, it has come across as an emphasis on conformity," remarked Wideman, who formerly served as SBC second vice president. "The emphasis on conformity as cooperation has led to the view of connectionalism that some have."

Baptists' practice of cooperation "does require that we get a proper view of history and reaffirm that churches, associations, state conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention are indeed autonomous and that the principle by which we work is voluntary cooperation, not enforced conformity," Wideman said.

Obviously, many other denominations have organizational structures which do not encourage or even allow autonomy. Roman Catholics have an elaborate hierarchical form of church government. Episcopalians, Methodists and Presbyterians practice various forms of connectionalism. Why is the principle of autonomy so important to Southern Baptists?

Albert McClellan, who served more than 20 years as associate executive secretary of the SBC Executive Committee, said vital questions in addressing that issue include: "Who are we? What are we? Where did we come from?"

Baptists "came out of the English Reformation," explained McClellan, who retired in 1980. "We came out of the day when freedom was really a key issue."

He said a significant document adopted by the SBC Executive Committee in the 1920s affirmed that "there is no inferiority or superiority among general Baptist bodies. They are all the same."

McClellan said autonomy also has "a very clear doctrinal rooting in Southern Baptist life. It is based on the individual, deliberate choice of Christ as Savior on the part of an individual.

"From that stems the idea that all members of the church have equal right to the privileges of the church," he said. "The church is a nucleus of people who are absolutely equal. There are no highs or lows, no classes in church membership, at least theoretically."

Jones added that the Baptist doctrine of the priesthood of the believer "requires autonomy." Baptists' understanding of "the rights of the individual can only be carried out in a system of autonomy," he said.

While agreeing that "autonomy is certainly a right that we have," Draper declined to tie it to the doctrine of priesthood. "Priesthood deals only with my relationship to God," he said. "I am free to go to God for myself. That's what priesthood means."

But Wideman joined McClellan and Jones in linking autonomy and priesthood of the believer. "Surrendering the autonomy of any Baptist body would be forfeiting one's decision-making rights, as understood in our doctrine of the priesthood of the believer," Wideman said.

With Baptist leaders holding differing views about the appropriate balance between autonomy and cooperation, what does the future hold?

"There are people who would like to make the Southern Baptist Convention another Episcopal or Catholic church," McClellan charged. "They want to substitute a whole new set of values for traditional Baptist values."

Insisting that such efforts are based on "a lack of knowledge and sheer ignorance," McClellan added, "Autonomy is a time-honored principle. All Southern Baptist bodies are independent and autonomous. They make their own decisions and do what they want to do.

"We are not beholden to kings and bishops for our work," he emphasized. "We don't have to answer to a presiding elder or pope. People arguing to the contrary are going to find they're up against a very tough problem. Autonomy is too deeply built into the warp and woof of our local churches."

Concerning those who would seek to make autonomy subordinate to cooperation, McClellan said, "Generally, the understanding is when the majority votes, we go along with it. But there is just so far we go in doing that. Sometimes the church may vote to do things that are entirely contrary to our basic understanding of what the church is. There are limits."

Jones said he believes the greatest threat to autonomy involves "people seeking to unduly influence an action they want by claiming that what one group does sets a precedent or a flow that other groups are obliged to follow. Although not organizational, the end results can be the same."

Detailing "the importance of maintaining our understanding of autonomy," Draper said, "The messengers to any convention are free to do anything they want to do. That's their autonomy. The church, the association and the state are free to ignore it."

But even amid differences of opinion, Draper added, "I hope we would not lose the sense of working together. There are ways for us to address our concerns without destroying the strength of our work -- which is cooperation. The kind of non-coercive, voluntary cooperative efforts we have is unique, as far as I know, in American religious life."

Wideman noted that some people "still view us as a pyramidal organization. It takes education to remind Southern Baptists that all Southern Baptist bodies are of equal standing.

"There always will be a tension, and must be," Wideman pointed out. "The absence of tension indicates we lean too far one way or the other. Autonomy is not meant to be self-centered to the neglect of serving with and working with others. Declaring complete independence from other Christians or surrendering one's autonomy to any authority would be improper extremes.

"Christians always live with tensions," he concluded. "The proper goal is balance."

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-- Greg Warner of ABP contributed to this story.

#### North Carolina convention approves 'pass-through' funding for Fellowship

CARY, N.C. (ABP) -- North Carolina became the sixth state to allow Baptist churches to channel their contributions to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship through state Baptist coffers.

The Executive Committee of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina authorized convention officials Dec. 3 to channel money designated by churches for the Fellowship on to the Atlanta-based organization. Only the American Bible Society and the statewide Christian Action League previously had the required approval.

North Carolina joined five other states in which Baptist conventions have approved "pass-through" funding for the Fellowship -- Florida, Maryland, Missouri, New York and Oklahoma.

Traditionally, money contributed by local Southern Baptist Convention churches for mission causes is sent to their state conventions, which keep a portion for their own work and send the rest to the SBC Executive Committee for distribution to 20 national Southern Baptist agencies.

However, some Southern Baptists displeased with fundamental-conservative control of those agencies have sought ways to withhold funding from some of them. The budget of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship sends about three-fourths of its income to traditional SBC agencies but excludes several other agencies from funding as a form of protest.

Churches can send mission funds to the Fellowship directly or, in these six states, through traditional state convention channels. For the states, the advantage of pass-through funding is they are more likely to get a portion of the money than when church contributions are routed directly to the Fellowship.

John Hewett, moderator of the Fellowship and a member of North Carolina's Executive Committee, noted the state convention currently receives \$35,000 to \$50,000 a month in money routed through the Fellowship by North Carolina churches but designated back to the state convention.

Now that pass-through funding has been approved, contributions from those churches presumedly will be routed first to the state convention and then on to the Fellowship, rather than the other way around.

"It is right and fair to allow those churches to fund CBF missions and ministries through normal state convention channels," said Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville.

"This decision honors the autonomy of local Baptist churches which seek ways to fund missions with integrity," he said.

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--By Greg Warner

Bill of Rights anniversary  
marred by assault, says Dunn

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Supreme Court's assault on the Bill of Rights jeopardizes religious freedom in the very year America is celebrating the document's 200th anniversary, said James Dunn.

Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, was the keynote speaker at a Dec. 15 celebration of the Bill of Rights at Third Presbyterian Church, Rochester, N.Y. The event was sponsored by the Interfaith Forum of Greater Rochester.

The Bill of Rights was ratified by Virginia on Dec. 15, 1791, and became the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution. To mark the bicentennial, President George Bush declared Dec. 15, 1991, Bill of Rights Day.

Dunn said the Bill of Rights transferred sovereignty from the states to the people.

The first 16 words of the Bill of Rights guarantee religious freedom. While acknowledging that it is the role of the Supreme Court to interpret those words, Dunn took exception to the current court's departure from the traditional interpretation of the religion clauses.

Justices Antonin Scalia and William Rehnquist are attacking the central meaning of the Constitution's guarantee of religious liberty, he added.

"Mr. Rehnquist consistently works to undermine the principle of church-state separation," Dunn said. "He declared war on the concept in his Wallace vs. Jaffree dissent saying, 'The wall of separation between church and state is a metaphor based on bad history, a metaphor which has proved useless as a guide to judging. It should be frankly and explicitly abandoned.'"

Thomas Jefferson is credited with developing the idea of a wall of separation between church and state.

"Many of us prefer to remain Jeffersonian than turn Rehnquistian."

Dunn also pointed to Scalia's opinion in an April 1990 decision in Oregon vs. Smith. In "an outburst of judicial activism unworthy of a conservative judge," Scalia gutted the First Amendment's free-exercise clause, Dunn said.

Scalia said government need not show a compelling state interest before limiting a citizen's religious practice, Dunn stated. As a result, a bill (H.R. 2797) was introduced in the House of Representatives to restore the religious-exercise protections that existed prior to the decision in Oregon vs. Smith, he told the group.

Yet, freedom's guarantee is not in doctrines, ideas or political constitutions, he said. Freedom's guarantee is visceral -- human beings are programmed for freedom, he said.

"Freedom's guarantee is ours universally, whether it is seen in the words of Jefferson around the dome in the Jefferson Memorial...or whether it is seen on the television replay of the man in the dark trousers in the white shirt standing in front of a tank in Tiananmen Square.

"We celebrate freedom's guarantee."

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-- By Pam Parry

HUD guidelines respond to  
religious-liberty concerns

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development recently adopted recommendations of the Baptist Joint Committee and other groups in drafting guidelines for a new program.

The BJC, joined by four other groups, filed comments March 19 on proposed guidelines for the Shelter Plus Care Program, which is designed to provide rental-housing aid to homeless persons with disabilities. HUD received 30 responses during the public comment period and recently released the program guidelines. (The guidelines are not a final rule, which has been postponed until the department gains experience during the early operation of the program).

Under the program, grants for rental assistance are made to states, local governments and Indian tribes. These entities may contract private, non-profit groups -- including religious ones -- to manage the services provided to homeless persons. The BJC was concerned that HUD's proposed rule did not safeguard against excessive church-state entanglement.

For example, the BJC comments said, the HUD program does not restrict the religious organizations that provide the government-supported services from providing religious instruction or counseling, conducting religious services, engaging in religious proselytizing, or exerting other religious influence.

The BJC pointed out that other HUD programs include such provisions in their regulations.

"The fact that under the new program religious organizations, unlike the older programs, do not receive grants directly from HUD, but only indirectly through contracts with state agencies, does not obviate the government's responsibility to make certain that public funds -- raised by taxation from all citizens -- are not used to promote sectarian interests," the comments said.

The BJC recommended that HUD adopt provisions similar to those used in the other programs, and the department did so. The guidelines also provide protections against religious discrimination for employees or any person applying for housing.

BJC staff attorney Al Sanders, who wrote the guidelines on behalf of the groups, said, "This action demonstrates that HUD remains committed to the constitutional principle of church-state separation. Moreover, I believe the overwhelming majority of Americans continue to agree that public funds -- raised by taxation of believers of many different faiths and non-believers -- should not be used to promote sectarian interests."

Joining in the BJC comments were Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

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-- By Pam Parry

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CORRECTION: In the Dec. 12 ABP story "Ruschlikon: From symbol of peace...", please make the following change in the second paragraph:

... a symbol of the division within the Southern Baptist Convention, most Southern Baptists do not know the history and work of the school.

\*\*\*\*\* END \*\*\*\*\*