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Chapman picked for top spot
at SBC Executive Committee

By Greg Warner

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Texas pastor Morris Chapman is the choice of the committee seeking a new chief executive for the Southern Baptist Convention, according to sources close to the process.

Chapman, who is the current SBC president and a leader of the controlling fundamental-conservative faction, could be elected president-treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee -- the SBC's most influential post -- as early as February, according to committee sources.

The powerful Executive Committee, based in Nashville, Tenn., is the SBC's primary administrative body, drafting the denomination's \$140 million annual Cooperative Program budget and acting for the convention between annual sessions.

If recommended and elected as the SBC's top executive, the 51-year-old Chapman would succeed Harold Bennett, 67, who will retire in October after 12 years in the job.

The 10-member committee charged with finding Bennett's successor met Jan. 2 in the vicinity of Dallas, reportedly to nail down details with Chapman, who is pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, 130 miles northwest of Dallas.

Several members of the search committee declined to say whether Chapman would be the nominee. But one Executive Committee member, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told Associated Baptist Press: "I think you have a good story. I think you have an accurate story."

Search committee members said they have agreed to let committee chairman Julian Motley of Durham, N.C., speak for them. Motley refused to comment, however, saying only that a recommendation is forthcoming.

Guy Sanders, a search committee member from Lake Wales, Fla., said the group is close to making an announcement, but he added, "The candidate has not agreed -- nor have we -- to put his name on the dotted line."

Told about the Chapman nomination, Sanders responded: "I won't confirm

or disallow anything you have said. I can say we are still on schedule to make our recommendation to the Executive Committee in February, and there will be a (news) release as soon as we have things worked out."

According to sources close to the search, the committee decided in December to pursue Chapman over the group's second choice, Paige Patterson, president of Criswell College in Dallas.

Sanders would not say specifically that Patterson was the committee's second choice. But he said recent talk about the committee's work -- which placed Chapman and Patterson at the top of the committee's list -- was "fairly accurate speculation."

The search group is expected to make its recommendation during the regular meeting of the Executive Committee Feb. 17-19 in Nashville. Chapman serves on the Executive Committee by virtue of his role as convention president, an annual elected position.

If elected to the Executive Committee post, Chapman probably won't assume his new duties until after the June meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, which as president he would be expected to moderate. Convention bylaws prevent one person from serving as president of both the Executive Committee and the SBC.

Although Chapman has talked candidly about the Executive Committee position in the past, he did not return repeated phone calls from Associated Baptist Press in early January.

For months Chapman has downplayed the persistent rumor that he is the leading candidate for the position, which would take him out of the pastorate for the first time in his ministry. However, he told ABP last September that he is "open to God's leadership" about the post and that he considers administrative skills -- so critical to the job -- to be among his "spiritual gifts."

Chapman has been pastor of the Wichita Falls congregation since 1979. He has been under some pressure to resign for several years, according to sources in the church. Conflict in the church caused some members to leave to form a new congregation recently.

Chapman has been a leader in the 12-year effort of SBC fundamental-conservatives to turn the denomination in a more conservative direction. In 1990 he became the sixth fundamental-conservative candidate to be elevated to the SBC presidency.

Like Patterson, who was the chief architect of the fundamental-conservatives' surge to power, Chapman has been mentioned as a leading candidate for almost every key denominational post in recent years.

Both Chapman and Patterson reportedly were finalists in the search for the Sunday School Board presidency, which eventually went to Jimmy Draper, another Texas pastor and former SBC president.

Sanders said it is no secret Chapman and Patterson were considered in the Executive Committee's search as well. "All those on the Sunday School Board list were on our initial list," he confirmed.

Although many insiders have considered Patterson too controversial for such a post, Sanders said the Executive Committee's search group did not shy away from any candidates on the basis of "their previous relationships in the denomination."

Since gaining control of the SBC's denominational structure in 1979, fundamental-conservatives have elected chief executives to at least five SBC agencies. However, replacing Bennett with a hand-picked successor at the Executive Committee would give fundamental-conservatives virtually unquestioned control of the SBC, including the denomination's purse strings.

If elected, Chapman would be the fifth person to hold the Executive Committee post.

A native of Kosciusko, Miss., Chapman holds a bachelor's degree from Mississippi College in Clinton, a master of divinity degree from Southwestern

Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and a doctor of ministry degree from Southwestern. He previously held pastorates in Albuquerque, N.M., and Rogers, Texas.

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Two top FMB staffers resign,
cite disagreements with trustees

By Robert Dilday

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The two key administrators of the Foreign Mission Board's mission strategy in Europe resigned Jan. 7 because, they said, FMB trustees are undermining Baptist witness on the continent.

Isam Ballenger, vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, and Keith Parker, area director for Europe, detailed plans to take early retirement later this year in a Jan. 7 press conference laced with unusually frank charges against trustees.

The pair, who have a combined 50 years of missionary service, declined to say what they will pursue after their retirements are effective -- May 31 for Ballenger and July 1 for Parker. The two have been key leaders in the FMB's European strategy, which has been at the center of controversy since October.

The announcements follow a bruising three-month debate across the Southern Baptist Convention and the European Baptist Federation concerning funding for the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, European Baptists' only international seminary.

Foreign Mission Board trustees voted 35-28 Oct. 9 to eliminate a \$365,000 contribution to the institution, which some allege teaches liberal theology. They reaffirmed the action Dec. 11 by a vote of 54-27.

Baptist leaders in most European countries denounced the action, which they said will jeopardize future relations between Baptists on the two continents. Several European leaders accused FMB trustees of exporting the SBC's theological/political controversy to Europe by requiring Baptists on that continent to adhere to fundamental-conservative doctrines.

"The events of October and December 1991 brought clearly into focus the chasm between the trustees and me," Ballenger, 56, told reporters and board staff in the chapel of the FMB's Richmond headquarters Jan. 7. "They concluded that I was not serving the conservative interests of the trustees.

"That is true," he continued. "I have never considered this to be my calling. With the clear signal that the so-called 'conservative resurgence' within the Southern Baptist Convention is also to be an agenda for the global mission effort, I can no longer represent the board at home or overseas."

The trustee action violates biblically based missiological principles, said Ballenger.

"I think the Bible teaches us to give to the world without having to govern, to donate without having to dominate, to cooperate with Baptists of other lands without questioning their credentials, as if we were the measure by which others are to be evaluated," he said.

"I believe the Bible teaches us to be partners, which leaves no room for paternalism."

Parker, 55, echoed Ballenger's reference to partnership.

"All our missionaries and staff are deeply committed to the Word of God and to theological integrity, as are our European colleagues," he said. "They serve in Christ's name and through their lives and ministries to influence and persuade others. They do not control by money and power...."

"There is much power in money, especially Western dollars," Parker

added. "Now the control attached to the use of that money, to be decided according to 'theological orthodoxy,' is a major shift (from past FMB practice)."

European Baptists cannot be forced into agreement with their Southern Baptist counterparts, Parker acknowledged. However, financially strapped Baptist unions may have little option but to accept Southern Baptist money and the doctrinal strings attached to it, he said.

"What does that do...to those tiny, poor unions who need our help and to their individual churches who may be told they must agree locally to whatever we Americans prescribe as 'basic' so they can get out of debt or build a church building?" he asked. "Is this the way to do missions?"

Ballenger and Parker were the key FMB staff people involved in handling the Ruschlikon seminary dispute, and both have been targets of trustee criticism as a result. Several trustees told Associated Baptist Press in December that Ballenger and Parker should leave the FMB.

But both men said Jan. 7 they had felt no "direct pressure" from trustees to leave and emphasized they had arrived at their decisions to retire "independently."

They agreed, however, that a breakdown in trust influenced their decisions. Ballenger noted he no longer can adequately relay European Baptists' concerns to FMB trustees because "either I am not trusted or what I have to say is irrelevant to (trustees') goals and intentions."

Added Parker: "I clearly do not have the full, or even partial, support or confidence of the majority of trustees. We no longer work in an atmosphere of trust."

That increased suspicion is having a wider impact as well, said Parker.

"Over many years trust has been built up not only between Southern Baptists but also within the European Baptist family," he said. "That trust is being destroyed and will profoundly affect mission outreach and ongoing work within Europe for generations."

The theological shift to the right in the SBC since 1979 and its effect on the Foreign Mission Board also contributed to their retirement decisions, Ballenger and Parker said.

In the 1960s and 1970s, led by "statesmen-like" board presidents such as Baker James Cauthen and Keith Parks, and trustees who represented the "best Southern Baptists had to offer," the FMB was moving "from strength to strength," Ballenger maintained.

"Then changes came to our denomination and to the trustees of this board...", he continued. "The majority has brought a different agenda, and it is an agenda I cannot serve."

However, in response to a question, he later added: "I hope my leaving does not say it is a time to surrender to these forces that have taken our denomination. I am not surrendering. I plan to be involved in the life and work of the church. I plan to stand for the freedom of Christians to interpret the Scriptures as they see fit, and not play games with words, and destroy institutions and the lives of people who serve this denomination."

Parker said that as a result of the 12-year theological conflict, a "political agenda within the SBC has overtaken most of our work to the near exclusion of mission."

As illustration, he cited a May 3 letter from California trustee Ron Wilson to board chairman William Hancock of Louisville, Ky., which has been extensively distributed in the past month.

In his letter, Wilson makes broad accusations of liberalism among missionaries, European Baptists and the faculty of Ruschlikon seminary, and urges rapid changes to address his concerns.

Parker said the SBC's transition has altered the Foreign Mission Board's claim "to serve all Southern Baptists."

"Discussion with trustees, studies of policy changes, statements of some

individuals and written documents give a clear picture that only 'inerrantists' should hold staff positions and be appointed as missionaries," he charged.

Yet in response to a question, neither he nor Ballenger discouraged Southern Baptists from applying for missionary careers.

Persons called by God to overseas service should contact the board and "see if their aspirations are not thwarted" by the trustees, said Ballenger. If appointed, they would work with "superb" administrators and missionaries and could continue serving "until they see they cannot."

Potential missionary candidates should "go for it," added Parker. "If God has called you, this is still a great group to go with."

Repercussions from the administrators' early retirements are likely to be widely felt. Some trustees may be angered by their blunt comments. Staff morale, reportedly already low, could diminish further. And the wariness of European Baptists, who are said to hold the men in high regard, may increase. Discussion of the retirements is certain to be on the agenda at a Jan. 26-29 meeting of European Baptist Federation leaders in Dorfweil, Germany.

Board president Parks expressed "sadness and regret" at the administrators' leaving. "Losing them at this crucial time of opportunity -- especially to lose both simultaneously -- is an incalculable loss to our mission cause," he said.

Parks said he hopes Ballenger's successor could be elected before the vice president's May 31 departure date. Trustee approval is necessary to fill both positions. Under normal procedures, Parks would recommend a vice presidential candidate for trustees to consider, while Parks and a vice president would jointly recommend an area director.

However, some observers question how much freedom Parks will have to nominate candidates for positions some trustees clearly believe to be pivotal in addressing alleged European liberalism.

Asked if the resignations presented an opportunity for trustees to appoint very conservative men to the posts, Parks responded, "I think that's rather obvious."

Ballenger's and Parker's long experience with European missions will be hard to replace, said Steve Hardy, chairman of the trustee committee that oversees work in Europe.

"They know all the leadership of the Europeans," said Hardy, a Burlington, N.C., pastor. "They've been involved in a wide variety of ministry opportunities in Europe and are highly respected."

Trustee Terry Harper of Colonial Heights, Va., apparently the only trustee to attend the press conference, called Ballenger's and Parker's decision "admirable if they can't agree with the board."

However, he added: "If they really are interested in missions as they say they are, they would minimize the propaganda and rhetoric."

Ballenger was appointed a missionary to Germany in 1965. He was associate to the area director for Europe and the Middle East from 1976-80 and president of Ruschlikon seminary from 1977 to 1980.

He became area director for Europe and the Middle East in 1982, and vice president for the region following a staff reorganization in 1987.

Parker's missionary service began in 1969 as a professor at Ruschlikon seminary, where he taught for 11 years. He was associate to the area director for Europe and the Middle East from 1982 to 87 and became area director for Europe as part of the 1987 reorganization.

Trustees may speed departure
of Parks from FMB, sources say

By Thomas Mullen

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The head of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board may be on his way out of the Richmond-based agency.

In the wake of the retirement Jan. 7 of two of his top executives, Keith Parks said discussions of his own future as board president will "intensify" over the next month or so. He declined to speculate further.

However, a coalition of fundamental-conservative trustees will ask the board during a meeting in February to speed up the establishment of a search committee to replace Parks, sources said.

Sources added that the same group also will report that the "continuity" of Parks' leadership will not be necessary to implement an ambitious missions project he outlined last year.

Parks, who will turn 65 in October, has said he wants to remain as president until 1995 and that changing administrative leadership before then would jeopardize meeting the goals of the mission plan.

However, most observers now believe Parks' future with the board is tenuous, especially since fundamental-conservative trustees will be able to replace the executives who retired -- Isam Ballenger, vice president for work in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, and Keith Parker, area director for Europe.

Parks, who lamented the resignations, told Associated Baptist Press that a majority of trustees will consider the resignations "appropriate." "A good number of trustees will be pleased that this has happened," he said.

Parks said the resignations and the dispute over FMB work in Europe will force several issues to the surface, including his own tenure.

"The board is going to have to clarify some things for the Southern Baptists and the (FMB) administration," he told ABP.

Concerning his own leadership of the Foreign Mission Board, Parks said, "I hope (the trustees) will clear it up for all concerned."

He said he has been consumed with current issues at the FMB and has "not entered into any serious consideration" of his future beyond the FMB.

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-- This story, reprinted with permission from the Richmond News-Leader, includes information from Associated Baptist Press.

Ruschlikon dispute part of strategy
to abandon European ties, letter says

By Greg Warner and Mark Wingfield

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The growing breach between Baptists in the United States and Europe may have been planned in advance by some Foreign Mission Board trustees and not merely the result of a dispute over a Swiss seminary.

A letter written by a trustee last May -- five months before the FMB defunded the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland -- outlines a comprehensive plan to correct "liberalism and the mistakes of Europe" by severing ties with European Baptists and dealing instead "with different people in all of Europe."

The letter, dated May 3, 1991, was written by trustee Ron Wilson, who serves on the FMB committee overseeing work in Europe, and sent to FMB

chairman Bill Hancock. It is unclear how Wilson's letter was made public, since both Wilson and Hancock deny leaking the letter to anyone. But by early January, copies had been acquired by some trustees, FMB staff members and members of the press.

Since the letter was written, several key elements of the strategy have been ~~not~~ adopted by trustees, including the defunding of the Ruschlikon seminary, funding of a conservative seminary in Romania, and policy changes that give trustees more control of the appointment of missionaries.

"The things mentioned in that letter are the things being done right now," said FMB President Keith Parks. "I would say the agenda is being followed pretty well."

Both Wilson and Hancock said the letter had no impact on those decisions, however.

"I assure you, I don't have that kind of influence on this board," Wilson said Jan. 7. Wilson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Thousand Oaks, Calif., pointed out other suggestions were ignored by the chairman and trustees.

"It didn't influence me one ounce," agreed Hancock, pastor of Highview Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky.

But Keith Parker, who resigned Jan. 7 as the FMB's area director for Europe, said Wilson's letter demonstrates the trustees' "global ambition" to enforce fundamentalist views on Baptists overseas.

Wilson's letter states: "If we cannot address liberalism and the mistakes of Europe, we will never be able to address liberalism and other problems in other parts of the world."

In a press conference Jan. 7, during which Parker and FMB vice president Isam Ballenger announced their resignations, Parker quoted from the letter, in which Wilson blamed the FMB staff for "mistakes" that led to the "European debacle."

The Foreign Mission Board works in partnership with established Baptist bodies in Europe, sending missionaries only when they are requested by Baptist leaders in each nation. But privately some trustees say such partnerships have hampered the FMB's outreach efforts in Europe because European Baptists are not conservative enough.

Wilson in his letter says the FMB should abandon established relationships with elected European Baptist leaders and work instead with more conservative Baptists on the continent.

"I realize that we have dealt with people and developed relationships over 40 years of time and that we would be taking a chance if we changed horses at this point in time," he wrote to Hancock. "However, the positive possibilities should far outweigh any fear we might have of making a mistake in this matter."

"We need to deal with different people in all of Europe and we desperately need to show the (FMB) staff that that is our desire," he wrote. "Giving money to (the seminary in) Oradea is our finest opportunity to move in that direction."

Funding the seminary -- a conservative, independent school affiliated with Second Baptist Church in Oradea, Romania -- demonstrates the authority of trustees and sends an encouraging message to "the conservative leadership of Western Europe and to "the new evangelical and non-compromised leadership of Eastern Europe," Wilson wrote.

Funds for the Oradea school were later authorized.

FMB president Parks acknowledged some trustees have complained that the FMB is "relating with the wrong leadership in Europe." But, he said, "it is not clear to me" who the trustees have in mind, if not the elected European leaders.

Some trustees have spoken of an emerging conservative or evangelical influence in Europe, particularly in the more conservative countries of the

East. They favor dealing directly with those groups, bypassing established Baptist unions on the continent.

According to Parks, Europeans see such attempts as "disruptive" to Baptist work there. "I don't see how it can work without creating different conventions," he warned.

The prospect of splitting European Baptist conventions has led critics on both continents to accuse FMB trustees of "exporting" the SBC controversy to Europe -- imposing on the European situation the same theological/political divisions that characterize Baptists in the States.

But, Wilson wrote, the denominational controversy "has already been exported overseas" during the last 25 years by FMB leaders "who allowed missionaries to be sent who were neo-orthodox in their theology."

"Thus, for over a generation we have exported our own heresy all over the world through some of our missionary force," he wrote to Hancock. "The crime has already been committed; the question is what are we going to do about it?"

"Sooner or later we must address the theological difficulties on the field in the same way that we addressed it here in the States," he continued. "Ultimately, we have got to ask people what it is you believe and what it is you are going to be teaching or, in some cases, (are) already teaching."

The place to start, Wilson said last May, is at the Ruschlikon seminary, which many trustees consider to be liberal.

The second target, Wilson said, should be the appointment process for new missionaries. He offered four possible changes: allowing all trustees to interview missionary candidates; moving the current interviews by regional committees two months earlier in the process; "getting rid of" the current candidate consultants, staff members who screen candidates and shepherd them through the appointment process; and requiring trustee approval of all candidate consultants.

The last option was approved by trustees in December.

Wilson said Jan. 7 that the disclosure of his letter should provide no revelations to anyone who knows his opinions. "I've been suggesting something be done with Ruschlikon for years," he said. "I've promised missionaries on the field that I would try to do something about Ruschlikon."

Wilson said the discovery in October that Southern Baptist seminary professor Glenn Hinson was teaching temporarily at Ruschlikon did more to sway FMB trustees than anything Wilson has ever said or written about the seminary.

However, Wilson said Hinson "was not the issue. The only thing that Glenn Hinson did was prove that what I had been saying was really happening."

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-- Also contributing to this story were Marv Knox and Robert Dilday.

Texas 'conservatives' organize
to take over state convention

By Jim Jones

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- More than 200 Texas Baptists met Jan. 7 to map strategy to take political control of the state convention for fundamental-conservatives, a leader of the group said.

The group met over breakfast in Fort Worth, Texas, where most participants were attending the state evangelism conference. They formed the Conservative Fellowship, which plans to have chapters throughout Texas, the

leader said.

One of its goals, he said, would be to return Baylor University to the control of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and to elect fundamental-conservatives as officers of the state convention.

Moderate-conservatives now are in control of the state convention, which claims 2.5 million members. But fundamental-conservatives have won control of the national Southern Baptist Convention, including its seminaries, mission boards and other agencies.

Texas fundamental-conservatives suffered a setback at last November's state convention when Baptists approved a plan that released Baylor from official control of the state organization. Joel Gregory, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, and others led a campaign at that time to restore Baylor to its former governing system.

Perry Ellis, a former missionary and staff member of First Baptist Church of Dallas, was named executive director of the new fellowship.

Among other leaders involved in forming the new group, the spokesman said, were Gregory; Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church of Dallas; Miles Seaborn, pastor of Birchman Baptist Church in Fort Worth; and John Morgan, pastor of Sagemont Baptist Church in Houston.

A statement of goals issued by the Conservative Fellowship, the spokesman said, encouraged participants to organize for next year's state convention and to establish a promotional plan to elect fundamental-conservatives to key Baptist offices, such as convention president.

One goal, he said, would be to set up a database for pertinent information on Texas churches, listing key church leaders such as the chairman of deacons and president of the Woman's Missionary Union.

He said other goals include promoting Bible study and evangelistic rallies, encouraging Christian renewal in the home, organizing Conservative Fellowship branches in all 112 Baptist associations, publishing a monthly newspaper, forming a financial committee and planning retreats for lay members in all regions of Texas.

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-- Reprinted with permission from the Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Group hopes to block
suit against Furman

By Christopher Schwarz

LANCASTER, S.C. (ABP) -- A group of Baptists in Lancaster, S.C., is threatening to go to court to block the South Carolina Baptist Convention from using churches' contributions to pay for legal action against Furman University.

Lancaster attorney Philip Wright said he represents clients who think it is wrong to use Baptist money for legal action when it was originally intended for mission work.

"Those churches gave the money for charitable purposes," Wright told the Greenville (S.C.) News. My clients see using that money for a lawsuit as an improper use of funds."

He said that if churches' contributions are used to pay for any legal action, he has been instructed by his clients to "file a civil action against the South Carolina Baptist Convention...to seek a permanent injunction to prohibit these expenditures."

Furman and some South Carolina Baptists have been at odds with one another over who should elect the school's governing board, which basically

runs the Baptist-affiliated university.

In November, South Carolina Baptists narrowly voted to let the courts decide who is allowed to elect the board of trustees and to pay for that legal action using the funds that Furman normally receives each year from the state Baptist convention.

Wright declined to identify his clients. But Associated Baptist Press learned one member of the group is C.G. Gregory Jr., a former Furman trustee who owns a building supply company in Lancaster.

In a letter to the editor published in the Baptist Courier of South Carolina Dec. 5, Gregory warned that Baptists in Lancaster had discussed seeking an injunction if Baptist money is used in a suit against Furman.

Gregory refused to discuss the situation with ABP or to say how many people are involved with his group. "We are really trying not to single out any individual on the thing," he said.

So far no lawsuit has been filed against Furman, but a Baptist committee to seek the legal action was formed recently. The committee will be funded with the interest income earned on Furman funds placed in escrow by the convention.

Wright said his clients believe that the Baptist money intended to support Furman -- about \$1.4 million -- should not be used against the school in court.

Wright, a 1973 Furman graduate and leader of a Lancaster-area alumni club, recently sent a letter to state Baptist officials outlining his clients' position. He said he hasn't heard back from the convention.

Eddie Greene, president of the state convention, said he doesn't think threatening legal action will help the situation.

"An action of this particular type only increases pressure rather than help the situation," said Greene, pastor of New Prospect Baptist Church in Anderson County. "These people say they are concerned about us taking Furman to court, and they also say they might take us to court. It seems a little inconsistent."

Furman's attorney said the Lancaster group has a valid point about the misuse of Baptist money, but he said Furman's trustees want to take a difference approach.

"The trustees are not interested in suing the state Baptist convention," said B.O. Thomason, Furman's general counsel. "The trustees have always hoped legal action could be avoided, because once a lawsuit is filed there is a lot of bitterness."

Meanwhile, a group of moderate-conservative Baptists in South Carolina also has protested the state convention's intention to sue. The steering committee of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of South Carolina voted Dec. 17 to ask the convention to reconsider its decision, arguing it would be immoral to take money given for one purpose and use for another.

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-- This story is reprinted with permission from the Greenville (S.C.) News and includes information from Associated Baptist Press.

Study finds teenage sex
increasing among Baptists

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The percentage of Baptist teenagers reporting premarital intercourse increased dramatically between 1984 and 1991, according to an informal eight-year study by M. B. Fletcher, professor of

psychology at Carson-Newman College.

Fletcher's study of the sexual behavior patterns of Christian adolescents found that the number of males reporting premarital sexual intercourse increased from 55 percent in 1984 to 70 percent in 1991.

An even sharper increase has reported among females. "Only 27 percent of the females admitted that they had engaged in premarital intercourse in 1984, but 53 percent in 1991 said they were sexually experienced," Fletcher's report said.

Fletcher surveyed students enrolled in a human-sexuality course he has taught since 1984 at Carson-Newman, a small Southern Baptist institution in Jefferson City, Tenn.

The study indicated sexual intercourse first occurs among adolescents around age 17, during the junior and senior years of high school.

Fletcher's findings closely parallel those of a national survey of high school students conducted by the Centers for Disease Control. According to the CDC, 72 percent of students are sexually active by the time they leave high school.

Sexual activity is on the rise at all high school grade levels, the CDC survey said. Sexual activity is reported by 40 percent of ninth graders, 48 percent of 10th graders and 57 percent of 11th graders. Less than half (45 percent) use condoms, but another third use other contraceptive methods.

Officials of the CDC said the study shows teenagers are at risk for three public-health epidemics: teenage pregnancies, transmission of the AIDS virus, and other sexually transmitted diseases.

The CDC findings suggest there is little statistical difference between the sexual activity of Baptist students and students nationwide.

According to Fletcher, 88 percent of students at Carson-Newman College are Baptist and most reportedly come from the conservative theological tradition of churches in southern Appalachia.

"The willingness of students to compromise the traditional values of their local church to justify a more promiscuous lifestyle raises troubling questions about the connection between what is taught in the church and the relativism in the thinking of adolescents," Fletcher said.

Fletcher's complete study will be made public in February at the first national conference of the Baptist Center for Ethics, which is based in Nashville, Tenn. Fletcher will deliver an address on "The Adolescent Experience: Sex Happens" during the conference, which will be held Feb. 2-3 at Immanuel Baptist Church in Nashville.

Other conference speakers will address the health-care crisis, genetic engineering, Christian Reconstructionism, hunger, sports ethics and other topics.

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Southern Baptist tells story
of abortion, guilt, healing

By Ferrell Foster

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (ABP) -- She was 18 years old and just out of high school. She was a committed Christian and an active Southern Baptist. She was single. And she was pregnant.

It was the early 1970s, before abortion was legal in the United States. But Jane (not her real name) had one anyway.

"I was raised in a Christian home," she began. "We were at church every time the doors were open."

She had one, long-term boyfriend during her high school years but broke

up with him. "Because of my Christian faith, I wanted him to be a part of it. He refused." And the relationship ended.

Jane began to see another man, but she still carried pain from the breakup. "It was not a serious relationship," she said. "I was reaching out to find a substitute, I suppose."

Sex became a part of her new relationship.

"I had been taught better," she said. She went to church each Sunday night and felt convicted that what she was doing was wrong, she said, but "then on Friday night it would happen again."

She became pregnant. Her parents didn't know. In order to see a doctor, she bought a cheap ring, made up a name for herself, then told the doctor her husband was in Vietnam.

After the doctor confirmed her pregnancy, she recalled, "the first thing I did was notify the baby's father."

"He said he had to go to college and make a life for himself, so there was no way he could help me." She never dated him again.

"Then I contacted the old boyfriend, and he gave me the name of a girl who could help me find an abortion," Jane continued. "He really thought he was trying to help me."

"My strongest feelings were letting my parents down and my church," she said. "I had seen the judgmental attitudes, criticism, all that came from 'Christians.' And although I had felt love, I didn't feel an unconditional love."

She said she concluded an abortion was the "solution" to her problem.

"The amount of time that you have to make a decision about the future of your child is very, very short," she recalled. "You basically have three months to work things out."

But the first month "you think you can't be" pregnant, she explained. The second month "you realize you are," and "a decision has to be made at that point."

"Emotions are not the thing that controls you then. It's more practical feelings." The baby has not moved yet and there are no sonogram pictures, Jane said. "It's just a head knowledge."

Jane contacted the girl her old boyfriend had told her about, and arrangements were made. The abortion cost \$500. Jane went to a local finance company and borrowed the money for "medical bills."

Shortly before Christmas, she and the contact person drove to a Belleville, Ill., neighborhood for the abortion. She told her parents she was going Christmas shopping. They pulled up at "a grandma kind of home."

The woman who performed the abortion was "your stereotyped grandma," Jane recalled. She took the young woman into the bathroom and used a clothes hanger to perform the procedure, which took about 10 or 15 minutes. "It seemed like forever to me."

"She gave me some antibiotics and said I would miscarry in the next couple of days and that would be the end of it."

But it didn't work. So Jane went through it again.

Three days later, she developed a fever and finally told her parents. "They were very calm about it, nothing like I expected," Jane said. "They were so concerned about me at that point."

Jane's parents took her to the hospital emergency room. But when she couldn't identify the woman who performed the abortion and she refused to give the name of the woman who had arranged it, "they refused to treat me and sent me home."

The next day, she called her old boyfriend. "He told me that he would rather I die" than give out the name of the contact person. Jane said she "spent a lot of time crying" after the call. But then she got mad. She told her parents she was ready to talk.

She made a full statement to law enforcement officials, and she was

taken to the hospital for treatment. She came home on Christmas Day.

"After that came the guilt," she said. "I felt guilty because I had not handled it in what I thought was a mature manner. I felt guilty for getting the girl (who helped her) in trouble."

The woman who performed the abortion was sentenced to seven years in prison "based on my testimony," Jane said.

Shortly afterward, "abortion started becoming a big issue of right and wrong," Jane recalled. She told of the pain in seeing the "baby killer" signs of protesters.

It was about 18 years before she forgave herself, Jane said. During those years, she thought about the abortion almost daily. "The guilt was just phenomenal. I can't even find anything to relate to it.

"The act was not an intentional hurtful thing. I had been told over and over that God forgives you of your sins." But she didn't feel forgiven, she said.

The guilt drove her to try to earn forgiveness. "I was going to work out my sin," she said. But when that didn't work, she became exhausted. "I was tired all the time, because no matter what I did it didn't ease the pain."

Jane hesitated to share the rest of her story. She said she was concerned that some would doubt the validity of "what finally happened."

Two or three years later, she said, "the Lord spoke to me in a vision. It was very, very, very real."

"This is the hard part for me because it is the best part," she said through tears. "One day in the early afternoon...I was reading in my bedroom... And I was awake. In the vision I was laying on the couch in the living room and Jesus appeared to me. He was holding a baby, and the baby was wrapped in a pink blanket.

"I got up and went toward him, and he said, 'You've got to let go of this.' He said, 'This is your little girl, and she is with me.'

"I stuck out my hand, and she wrapped her fingers around my index finger, and the Lord reached up and put his hand on my hair."

Jane said Jesus then lifted the baby and pressed its cheek to her own cheek. "He said, 'I have important things for you to do and this is preventing you from doing them.' And he said, 'She's OK. She's with me.'

"And when that was over, I felt like I had lost a thousand pounds. I felt like I could float around the room," Jane said. "It was a tremendous healing, and I've never felt that guilt since. But that's not to say I haven't felt the sadness."

After that experience, Jane by chance came in contact with the doctor who had treated her at the hospital. She told him that she had married, and the doctor asked if she had adopted any children.

When she said that she had given birth to children herself, Jane recalled he replied, "You couldn't have had children, you were so scarred up inside."

"So it was like the Lord was opening windows and doors everywhere for me to see I had made a mistake and I would always walk with a limp, you might say, but he has the power to turn things around and blesses in spite of ourselves."

How does Jane feel about the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortions in the United States?

"When it first came out, I thought it was good. The reason I was suffering so much, I thought, was the method" that was used in her abortion. Then she met women who had had legal abortions and she found out "their pain was the same as mine.

"So then I began to believe that abortion was wrong but that we're failing girls by not accepting their human weaknesses and helping them work through it," Jane said. "They need to feel they can come to (Christians) without condemnation."

Should abortion be legal?

"No. But if you're going to make it illegal, you've got to address the issue. You can't bury your head in the sand. Outlawing it is not going to stop it."

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