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Phone: (904) 396-0396 Fax: (904) 396-4441 CServe: 70420,73

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Parks retirement leaves question
of Fellowship role unanswered

By Greg Warner

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Will Keith Parks lead the new missions effort of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship?

That question -- perhaps the one most frequently asked in the wake of Parks' surprise retirement announcement March 20 -- likely won't be answered for some time.

Fellowship leaders said March 21 Parks probably will be asked to work with the moderate-conservative group's embryonic missions effort, but not immediately. And Parks, who has been president of the Foreign Mission Board since 1980, says he has made no plans beyond his retirement in October, when for the first time in 38 years he won't be an employee of the Foreign Mission Board.

Parks told trustees he will retire when he turns 65 in October -- three years earlier than planned -- because of "philosophical differences" with trustees over how to do missions. He said in February there had been a "drastic shift" in the trustees' mission philosophy, with fundamental-conservative trustees now "expecting theological conformity from those who receive Southern Baptist money."

Trustee chairman Bill Hancock insisted the FMB has not left its missiological moorings. But Fellowship leaders say their fledgling organization has inherited the traditional Baptist commitment to missions and that Parks would fit right in with the Fellowship's recently announced plans to begin mission work in Europe.

"The Fellowship is made up of the very people who for years and years have denied themselves and their churches to do missions, and that remains the glue that pulls us together," said Cecil Sherman of Fort Worth, Texas, who will become the Fellowship's top administrator in April.

"I am hopeful that out of all that, we can find ways to pull together the best mission leadership, the best missionaries, and the finest in Baptist life to continue to do missions," Sherman continued. "I cannot imagine us doing that without considering Keith Parks."

But, Sherman added: "This is not an appropriate time for us to press

ourselves upon him. He knows about our great love for missions. Of course, we have things to talk about."

Sherman declined to say if Fellowship leaders have met previously with Parks to discuss a position.

The Fellowship plans to hire a missions coordinator to direct its new global missions effort. That initiative will focus first on Europe, where recent decisions by FMB trustees have hurt relations with European Baptists and caused a handful of missionaries and administrators to quit.

The Fellowship expects to spend about \$900,000 on global missions this year, increasing to \$2.5 million in 1993. By then the organization hopes to hire as many as 20 "missioners," some of them former Southern Baptist missionaries who, like Parks, have become disenchanted with the direction taken by FMB trustees.

Fellowship supporters and critics both acknowledge that Parks' hiring, or even his endorsement, would add instant credibility and likely a lot of Baptist money to the Fellowship's missions initiative.

For that reason, some trustees were very interested in Parks' future plans when they met with him behind closed doors March 19-20 near Dallas. But they too will have to wait for an answer, according to sources who participated in the discussions.

Although Parks' future relationship with Fellowship was one of 25-plus issues raised by trustees early in their 13-hour session with the president, it was not on the distilled list of 10 questions Parks was later asked to answer.

In a press conference after the meeting, Parks told reporters that while he expects "to continue to be involved" in missions after retirement, he was not asked by trustees to rule out involvement with the Fellowship and he made no promise to do so.

But sources in the meeting said Parks was warned privately that his departure from the FMB would hurt the cause of Southern Baptist missions and siphon Baptist money away from the FMB.

If indeed the FMB suffers financially as a result, the Fellowship is the group that most likely stands to gain.

Sherman said he hopes now "many, many Baptists will trust us" to spend their missions money. "Christ commanded us to be about missions. We welcome this challenge."

He suggested Parks' resignation will make it easier for the Fellowship to convince Southern Baptists that a new approach to missions is needed.

"It probably will clarify to many of our churches many of the things we have been saying," Sherman said. "Keith Parks is a very clear demonstration that fundamentalists do missions very differently from the way Keith Parks and the Fellowship do missions."

Parks outlined some of his own differences with trustees in a March 21 interview with the Western Recorder, newsjournal of Kentucky Baptists.

He said trustees reflect the Southern Baptist Convention's shift toward a creedal rather than confessional approach to missions. "By confessional, I mean that we confess what we believe and say, 'If you agree, let's work together,'" he said. "But under a creedal approach, you say, 'We're going to check you out to see if you believe as we do.'"

The latter approach also violates the traditional indigenous principle of doing missions within the culture and context of the people with whom missionaries work, Parks said. "I sense a desire to extend a Southern Baptist doctrine and conformity overseas."

Trustees deny they are trying to force their beliefs on Baptists abroad. But they say good stewardship of Baptist money must provide some "accounting" for doctrine. In December trustee Joel Gregory, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, told fellow trustees there must be "a clear linkage between (FMB) funds and the theological integrity of all

institutions" with which the Foreign Mission Board relates.

Sherman said Parks should be commended for objecting to the trustees' "creedal" approach to missions. "It really is important for him to say, 'I can't work with this arrangement,'" Sherman noted.

The Fellowship will try to restore the "confessional" approach to missions, he added, giving "full respect" to the Baptists and nationals in other countries. "Our job is to try to do it right again," he said.

Of Parks, Sherman said: "It is regrettable that the best missions leader of my generation has been crowded till he no longer feels free to perform his task and has to leave the Foreign Mission Board."

"I pray there will still be a place in Baptist life for the enormous gifts of Keith Parks to be exercised in missions," Sherman said. "We need him."

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Parks explains retirement
to FMB staff members

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Keith Parks, president of the Foreign Mission Board, told FMB staff members March 23 that some of the board's trustees wanted him to exert more control over the theological beliefs of staff members and missionaries.

Parks said such an approach represents a "creedal" rather than a "confessional" approach to mission leadership, an approach he is unwilling to accept.

Parks told trustees March 20 he will retire in October, three years earlier than planned, because of philosophical differences with trustees.

During closed-door discussions with trustees recently near Dallas, Parks said, trustees noted he has refused to endorse the "conservative resurgence" within the Southern Baptist Convention.

According to Parks, some trustees seem to believe that if a person's politics and theology are correct, he or she is qualified to be a missionary or trustee. But theology is only one part of missiology, not the whole, he explained.

Parks reminded staff members that the Foreign Mission Board has been committed to the "indigenous" principle of missions. That means stripping away the cultural overlays of Southern Baptists and the Western world to focus on the heart of the gospel.

He said it was wrong for trustees to require national Christians overseas to believe exactly as Southern Baptists believe in order to work together.

Parks said he appreciates the fact that trustees reaffirmed the seven principles which have guided the work of the FMB over the years. But he expressed skepticism that trustees understand how those principles work themselves out in the details of doing mission work.

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-- From the staff of the Word & Way, newsjournal of Missouri Baptists.

N.C. Baptists may exclude
churches that endorse gays

ASHBORO, N.C. (ABP) -- Baptist leaders in North Carolina want to exclude churches that endorse homosexuality from participation in the state

convention.

Top elected leaders of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina and its General Board have proposed the change in the convention's policy on membership. It will be presented to the full board May 19 for approval.

The convention, which is composed of Baptist churches that contribute financially to its work, will be asked to refuse contributions from any church that "manifests public approval, promotion or blessing of homosexuality." Refusing to accept money from those churches will effectively prevent them from participating in the state convention.

The proposal was prompted by the decision of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh to approve the "union" of two homosexual males, and the pending decision of Binkley Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill to license a homosexual male to the ministry.

The proposal in North Carolina follows the lead of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, which in February took the first steps toward excluding churches that endorse homosexuality from participation in the Southern Baptist Convention. The committee is studying a revision of SBC bylaws similar to the one proposed in North Carolina.

The North Carolina proposal states: "No funds of any kind, designated or undesignated, shall be accepted by this convention, its programs, institutions, or agencies, from any church which knowingly takes, or has taken, any official action which manifests public approval, promotion or blessing of homosexuality. Any such church shall not therefore qualify as a 'cooperating church' as defined in Article IV, A, 3 of the Constitution of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

"This in no way negates the importance of local church autonomy or the biblical mandate for all Christians to minister to the needs of all people in keeping with the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ," the proposal adds.

The change was signed by five elected leaders of the convention and Roy Smith, executive director-treasurer of the state convention.

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Administration partially
lifts abortion 'gag rule'

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Bush administration has partially revoked a controversial regulation forbidding abortion counseling at federally funded family planning clinics.

The new interpretation of the 1988 ban would allow doctors to discuss abortion with women who come to Title X clinics. Other clinic workers, who see the bulk of the clients, still are forbidden to counsel women on abortions.

The Department of Health and Human Services distributed the new guidelines to its regional offices in a March 20 memorandum. The narrow exemption attempts to address the pervasive criticism that the counseling ban interferes with the doctor-patient relationship, leading opponents to label the ban a "gag rule."

The HHS memo states that the regulation will be implemented in accordance with a Nov. 5, 1991, memo issued by President George Bush that said, "Nothing in these regulations is to prevent a woman from receiving complete medical information from a physician."

The counseling ban was implemented in 1988 by President Ronald Reagan and has been maintained by the Bush administration. The controversy surrounding the counseling restriction intensified in May 1991 when the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the ban (*Rust v.*

Sullivan).

Congress approved legislation in November 1991 that would have blocked enforcement of the ban but was unable to override a presidential veto.

Some opponents of the ban say the reversal will have little impact because few doctors provide care at Title X clinics.

Title X is a \$150 million family planning program serving 4 million low-income women through 4,000 clinics.

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-- By Pam Parry

Bush vetoes tax bill
amid partisan politics

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The battle between Congress and the White House was joined March 20, and when the smoke cleared the outlook for election-year economic reform was dismal.

President George Bush vetoed an economic reform package, which contained two provisions that would have impacted charitable donors, just minutes after Congress finished with it. The veto further entrenched the administration and lawmakers on opposite sides of an election-year battle.

The tax package would have made it more attractive for Americans to donate gifts of appreciated property to charitable institutions. The bill would have temporarily repealed a 1986 provision that subjected the appreciated portion of such gifts to the alternative minimum tax. The proposal would have provided only a two-year window, affecting contributions made in 1992 and 1993.

Representatives of charitable organizations, including Baptist institutions, say the 1986 tax provision has caused a decline in large gifts to universities, hospitals and other institutions.

The package also contained a two-year extension of present law that limits itemized deductions, including charitable contributions, for high-income individuals. Itemized deductions for high-income taxpayers are reduced by an amount equaling 3 percent of their adjusted gross income in excess of \$105,250 in 1992.

The conference report on H.R. 4210, approved by the House of Representatives, 211-189, and the Senate, 50-44, would have increased taxes on the very wealthy, while lowering taxes for low- and middle-income taxpayers. Bush said he would not sign a bill containing tax increases.

Bush blasted Congress for failing to approve a tax bill he could support while congressional leaders fired back. As a result of the impasse, the forecast for economic reform legislation remains bleak.

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-- By Pam Parry

President establishes national
commission on urban families

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President George Bush established a national commission March 12 to examine the condition of urban families and to make policy recommendations to strengthen them.

Bush announced his plan to establish the National Commission on America's Urban Families during his State of the Union address in January.

In the address, Bush said strengthening the family was part of his long-term plan to guarantee America's future.

Bush said he met with mayors from the League of Cities and they told him that "the major cause of the problems of the cities is the dissolution of the family. They asked for this commission, and they were right to ask, because it's time to determine what we can do to keep families together, strong and sound."

The duties of the eight-member commission include analyzing ways to improve non-profit and private efforts to preserve urban families and evaluating the effectiveness of existing government policies and programs in undergirding the family structure.

The commission is to make its recommendations to the president by Dec. 31 and will dissolve 30 days later.

The President announced his intention to appoint Gov. John Ashcroft of Missouri as chairman and Annette Strauss, former mayor of Dallas, as co-chairman.

Other commission appointees include Victor Ashe, mayor of Knoxville, Tenn.; David Blankenhorn, president, the Institute for American Values, New York; Alphonso Jackson, executive director, Dallas Housing Authority; Irene Johnson, president, LeClaire Courts Resident Management Corp., Chicago; Josephine Velazquez, chairman of various fund-raising projects for Children's Home Society, Miami; and Bill Wilson, pastor, Metro Assembly of God, Brooklyn, N.Y.

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-- By Pam Parry

Supreme Court to review
animal sacrifice ordinances

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Can cities ban religiously motivated conduct that is permissible when carried out for secular reasons?

That question is at the heart of a Florida animal-sacrifice case the U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to review. The case gives the high court an opportunity to clarify how far government can go in restricting religious practice.

The high court announced March 23 that it will review lower federal court decisions that upheld Hialeah, Fla., ordinances that prohibit ritual sacrifice of animals but do not restrict the killing of animals for other reasons.

Hialeah officials adopted the ordinances after adherents of the Santeria religion announced plans to establish a church in the city.

Santeria is an ancient religion that arrived in South Florida in the 1950s and 1960s by way of Cuba and West Africa. The sacrifice of animals such as chickens, pigeons, doves, ducks, guinea fowl, goats, sheep and turtles are considered an integral part of Santeria rituals and ceremonies.

A federal district court held that the Hialeah ordinances, while not "religiously neutral," are constitutional because they target religious conduct, not belief. The court identified three "compelling" purposes for the ordinances: to prevent cruelty to animals, to safeguard the health, welfare and safety of the community and to prevent adverse psychological effects on children exposed to animal sacrifices.

After a federal appeals court upheld that decision, Santeria lawyers appealed to the Supreme Court, arguing that Hialeah singled out religion for adverse treatment by prohibiting the killing of animals for ritual or sacrifice while permitting the killing of animals for food, recreation or human convenience.

In recent years, the high court has been redefining how much justification government must have to restrict religious practice. In a key 1990 opinion, Employment Division vs. Smith, the court held that in most cases government no longer had to show a compelling reason to restrict religious exercise.

In that case, the high court held that "neutral, generally applicable" laws and policies could restrict religious practice without a compelling reason. Laws that single out religion, however, still must be justified by a compelling reason.

The Smith decision has been criticized by most U.S. religious bodies, which have been urging Congress to restore the "compelling interest" in all free-exercise cases.

"We hope this signals a desire on the part of the court to apply the Smith decision in a way that is friendly to free exercise," said Brent Walker, associate general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee. "Where religion is singled out for discriminatory treatment, government must demonstrate a compelling interest, even under Smith."

Walker said it is "hard to see how government could have a compelling interest in preventing ritual sacrifice when it allows the killing of animals for secular purposes."

The key issue in the case is not ritual sacrifice but the level of protection courts give free-exercise rights, Walker said.

"This is of concern to all religions," he said. "What the government is allowed to do to the most unpopular sect it will eventually be able to do to mainstream denominations."

A ruling in the case, Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye vs. City of Hialeah, is not expected until next year.

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-- By Larry Chesser

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