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15 FMB missionaries  
resign from Europe

By Robert Dilday

RICHMOND, Va (ABP) -- Fifteen Southern Baptist missionaries serving in Europe have resigned this month, Foreign Mission Board officials confirmed April 2.

At least two of the missionaries, John and Revonda Deal, based in Switzerland, are citing recent actions by the board's fundamental-conservative trustees as decisive in their resigning, said Winston Crawley, interim vice president overseeing the FMB's work in Europe.

Crawley said health and other personal reasons led to the others' decisions, although he acknowledged in "two or three cases" opposition to the direction taken by the FMB may have been "background factors."

"Resignations come along board meeting by board meeting," said Crawley. "It's not really news. The reasons are usually personal ones."

However, some board administrators said privately that dissatisfaction with the direction of the Foreign Mission Board, particularly in Europe, has played a more significant role in the resignations than is acknowledged publicly, and that attention has been focused on missionaries in Europe because of recent events impacting FMB missions on the continent.

The FMB has been immersed in controversy since last October, when trustees slashed the board's contributions to the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, citing alleged liberalism there.

The action led in January to the early retirements of the board's top Europe administrators, Isam Ballenger and Keith Parker. Both men claimed the action indicated the board is changing the way it works overseas, although trustees denied the charge.

Last month, FMB President Keith Parks announced plans to retire in October, when he turns 65, because of "philosophical differences" with the trustee board, which is now controlled by fundamental-conservatives.

Deal was an administrative associate to Parker, living near Ruschlikon. He was named to the position a little more than a year ago.

Other resigning missionaries are John and Celia Bane, Italy; Barry and Vicki Bates, Portugal; Robert and Debbie Cochran, Eastern Europe; Glenn and Camilla Dyer, Germany; John and Diane Haeger, Italy; Tom and Brenda

Stallworth, Austria; and Kathie White, Scotland.

It was not immediately clear what reasons they cited for resigning.

Harlan Spurgeon, vice president for mission personnel, said 15 resignations from one administrative area is unusual.

"That's a higher than normal figure from an area the size of Europe," he noted. The number of missionaries assigned to Europe -- approximately 290 in 20 countries -- is smaller than other administrative areas, he said.

The effective dates for most of the resignations range from April 30 to Sept. 15, although the Bates' resignation went into effect Feb. 15.

Administrators of the FMB will report the resignations to trustees April 6, at the beginning of the board's meeting in Clemson, S.C.

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BJC suggests arbitration  
to settle funds dispute

By Larry Chesser and Greg Warner

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Baptist Joint Committee has offered to use "Christian conciliation" to settle a dispute over \$300,000 on deposit at the Southern Baptist Foundation.

The offer for binding arbitration was presented in an April 2 letter to James Guenther, attorney for the Southern Baptist Executive Committee. The Executive Committee voted in February to ask Southern Baptist Convention messengers in June for authority to reallocate the funds.

Oliver Thomas, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, told Guenther the Washington-based religious-liberty agency "is prepared to submit this matter to binding arbitration" and suggested that the arbitration be facilitated by Sam Ericsson, former executive director of the Christian Legal Society.

Thomas' letter indicated the arbitration offer would remain open through April 17. But Guenther said the Executive Committee could not act on the arbitration request before June, when its next meeting is scheduled.

"The request just came in today," Guenther told Associated Baptist Press April 2. "I've forwarded it to my client and they have not had any opportunity to respond to it.... It is not a deadline I can see any way the Executive Committee can meet."

Hollis Johnson, president of the Southern Baptist Foundation, was unavailable for comment. However, through a Foundation spokesperson, Johnson said "his trustees have advised him that he does not have opinion on the Baptist Joint Committee matter."

The Foundation, acting on Executive Committee instructions, recently sent the BJC a check for \$81,036, the amount of accumulated interest currently in the account. But the Foundation has declined to honor the BJC request to release the \$300,000 in principal unless the move is authorized by the Executive Committee.

Since the SBC approved the original capital-needs gift in 1964, and the funds were allocated in 1967 and 1968, the BJC has collected more than \$560,000 in interest on the account.

Thomas' letter said that while the BJC appreciated receiving the partial payment from the Foundation, "justice will not be served until the rest of our money has been turned over to us."

"We feel we have no choice but to pursue this matter, as the intention of the messengers of the 1964 SBC must not be defeated," Thomas wrote Guenther. "Before we consider other remedies, however, we want to extend a final offer of Christian conciliation."

"We are eager for all parties to do the right thing," he told Guenther.

"The Bible commands it. Christian love commends it."

Thomas noted that an arbitration approach had been suggested by Richard Land, executive director of the SBC Christian Life Commission, which has asked the Executive Committee for the funds.

In his letter, Thomas disputed the Executive Committee's finding that the BJC had not satisfied the only condition placed on the account -- that it be used for a share in the cost of a Washington, D.C., building for the BJC.

Additionally, Thomas told Guenther the Executive Committee's involvement in the dispute violated procedures set forth in the charter, constitution and bylaws of both the convention and Foundation.

The Executive Committee became involved after the Foundation asked the committee to notify it of "any conditions which have been approved by either the Executive Committee or the Southern Baptist Convention."

Thomas told Associated Baptist Press that Johnson has indicated he will not release the funds without executive committee instruction.

Thomas told Guenther the BJC has "tried to be patient and Christlike in this matter. In fact, we have waited months for your client to make a recommendation concerning our account. We were even prepared to entertain some sort of compromise, but your client's indifference toward the rule of law and callous attitude toward an agency that continues to serve Southern Baptists faithfully cannot go unchallenged.

"If the BJC's account with the SBC and its Foundation can be diverted from its original purpose, anybody's can."

Guenther defended the Executive Committee's decision to seek reallocation of the money.

"Our opinion has been that there is nothing illegal about the Executive Committee's decision to recommend to the SBC that these funds be reallocated," Guenther told ABP, "and there is nothing in (Thomas') letter to me that changes my judgment about that."

The BJC recently retained the law firm of Powell, Goldstein, Frazer & Murphy to assist it in efforts to recover the foundation funds.

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Furman talks break down,  
making lawsuits likely

COLUMBIA, S.C. (ABP) -- With negotiations between Furman University and the South Carolina Baptist Convention apparently at an impasse, state convention leaders said April 2 they will now "take the necessary legal steps" to retain control of the Baptist-affiliated school.

The announcement increased the likelihood that the convention will now file a lawsuit against the school. A response to the news was not immediately available from Furman officials, who were scheduled to hold a news conference late April 2 to address the issue.

Furman trustees acted in 1990 to amend the Greenville, S.C., university's charter to give the school power over the election of trustees, which had been controlled by the state convention. Messengers to the annual convention meeting last November narrowly voted to take Furman to court rather than surrender control.

A committee appointed by the state convention had been negotiating with Furman officials in recent months. But a statement from the committee April 2 expressed "great regret" that a settlement was impossible.

"Having been unable to reach a negotiated settlement," the statement said, "and having our offer of arbitration refused by Furman, we have no choice but to reluctantly proceed to take the necessary legal steps to

contest the Oct. 15, 1990, amendments to the Furman charter."

The negotiations broke down, the committee said, "because neither side is willing to concede control of a majority of seats on the board of trustees to the other side."

The committee requested a special meeting of the convention's general board to authorize the next step. "We have no choice but to carry out the expressed wishes of South Carolina Baptists," the statement said.

If a lawsuit is filed, it likely will prompt a counter suit from a group of Baptists in Lancaster, S.C., who have protested the use of church-contributed funds to take the school to court.

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-- By Greg Warner

SBC leaders convince agencies  
to cancel Fellowship exhibits

By Greg Warner

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- A behind-the-scenes campaign led by top Southern Baptist officials has persuaded almost all Southern Baptist agencies not to promote their goods and services at the upcoming general assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Within a period of three days, seven of the eight Southern Baptist Convention agencies and institutions that earlier had committed to sponsor exhibits at the Fellowship meeting cancelled those plans.

As of April 2, the Annuity Board was the only remaining SBC agency on the list of exhibitors. But board president Paul Powell told Associated Baptist Press he may still reverse his agency's decision to participate.

Meanwhile, Woman's Missionary Union, an SBC auxiliary, indicated it will proceed with its plans to participate in the Fellowship assembly, set for April-May 2 in Fort Worth, Texas.

Gone from the list of 45 original exhibitors, however, are the Sunday School Board, Radio and Television Commission, Brotherhood Commission and four Southern Baptist seminaries -- Southern, Southwestern, New Orleans and Midwestern.

The SBC agencies were scheduled to join a variety of vendors that will display their goods and services to Fellowship participants and churches as part of a resource fair during the three-day meeting, which last year attracted 6,000 people.

The cancellations followed phone calls and fax messages to SBC agency leaders from Morris Chapman, president-elect of the SBC Executive Committee, David Hankins, chairman of the Executive Committee, and Jimmy Draper, president of the Sunday School Board.

In recent months, SBC leaders have bristled at attempts by the Fellowship to convince churches to divert contributions from the Cooperative Program, the SBC's traditional means of funding its work, to the Fellowship's own mission efforts.

"Cooperative Baptist Fellowship promotional materials advocate bypassing existing Cooperative Program channels," Draper said in a memo faxed to all SBC agencies. "We want to avoid any misunderstanding that, by our presence, the board would be supporting any avenue of mission support that would erode the Cooperative Program."

Fellowship leaders point out, however, that most of the money their organization receives ends up in the same place anyway. Although normal SBC funding channels are bypassed, more than three fourths of the \$4.5 million received by the Fellowship last year was designated for Southern Baptist

agencies.

In addition to his fax, Draper discussed the matter with several agency leaders by telephone in recent days. But one Executive Committee source said Chapman, who won't assume his new Executive Committee role until this summer, initiated the campaign and solicited Draper's help.

Chapman was unavailable for comment. And Draper did not respond to requests to discuss the situation with Associated Baptist Press.

Powell of the Annuity Board said Chapman called him "to share his feelings about whether any of our agencies ought to be going to these meetings. It was his opinion that they should not."

Powell said he called Draper after receiving Draper's fax message, but Powell denied any knowledge of pressure tactics. "I don't know what has gone on behind the scenes," he said.

But sources who demanded anonymity for fear of endangering their agencies confirmed that Draper's memo implied to them that other agency heads should follow the Sunday School Board's lead.

Most agency spokespersons denied that outside pressure forced their organizations to change direction on the matter, however. "We do not feel any pressure outside the Brotherhood Commission," said Brotherhood spokesman Mike Day.

Executive Committee chairman Hankins said he talked to some SBC agency heads about their participation in the Fellowship meeting. But he termed those conversations "fraternal" and noted they dealt more with ideas and feelings than any concrete actions or reactions.

Reports circulating among some SBC agencies indicated Executive Committee leaders had threatened to withhold Cooperative Program budget funds from agencies represented at the Fellowship's meeting.

But Hankins downplayed the possibility of such a threat as "a matter of interpretation." "The Executive Committee doesn't have any prerogatives -- and I certainly don't have as chairman -- to tell anybody what to do," he insisted.

Powell said April 1 the advice of Draper and Chapman and others prompted him to reconsider the participation of his agency, which offers insurance and retirement plans to Southern Baptist churches and agencies.

But Powell insisted he will make the decision based on "what is best" for his agency and all its clients and will not "buckle under to pressure." "As far as I'm concerned, the Annuity Board is off limits to politics," he said.

But Powell acknowledged that if the Annuity Board changes its earlier decision and pulls out, some people will see that as evidence the agency is susceptible to political pressure. "No matter what you do, it's going to be wrong with a lot of folks," he concluded.

Cecil Sherman, Fellowship coordinator, called the cancellations "unfortunate." He suggested such "confrontational" tactics from SBC leaders are creating tension between the convention and the Fellowship, forcing agencies and churches to choose between the two. "And that is not our choice," he said.

"Our desire is for mutuality," Sherman said. "We are doing some things the Southern Baptist Convention is no longer doing, but we also will continue to do some things through the Southern Baptist Convention."

"We still have emotional ties (to the SBC agencies)," he said. "We still use those sources. We remain graduates of those schools. It is pleasing, warm and appropriate for them to be at this meeting."

Although the Fellowship's three budgets are designed to exclude several SBC agencies with which moderate-conservatives are most dissatisfied, Sherman said: "There is still a great deal of goodwill (toward the SBC agencies) among the churches that fund through the Fellowship. In fact, their presence within the Fellowship is more a statement of disappointment (with the SBC)

than withdrawal."

"I know of no church or organization that put 77 percent of its 1991 money into the agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention," said Sherman, referring to the Fellowship's funding of SBC causes. "To say that we've backed off (from the SBC) does not describe what we do with our money."

While the Fellowship is contributing to SBC causes, Powell said, other people argue the Fellowship is working contrary to SBC by "not promoting giving through the Cooperative Program."

"It gives you reason to rethink and say, 'Maybe they (SBC leaders) are right,'" Powell added.

"The question is: Would our presence there (at the Fellowship meeting) be contrary to being an agency of the Southern Baptist Convention?" Powell said. "I'm really grappling with what is the best decision to make for the Annuity Board and the way it can continue to serve all people of the Southern Baptist Convention."

"The folks in the Fellowship are our people too, but that does not necessitate our being at their meeting," he said.

Powell said the Annuity Board participated in the Fellowship's national meeting last year as an "observer" and "probably will again this year." "We need to know what's going on in our convention so we can best serve our convention."

Hankins, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La., said he appreciates the "sensitivity" of the agencies deciding not to be represented in Fort Worth. "It's a tough call. I understand they wouldn't want to disappoint anyone. But you have to make difficult decisions to avoid conflict of interest."

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-- Contributing to this story were Mark Wingfield and Marv Knox, both of the Western Recorder of Kentucky.

Congressional resolution would  
designate Religious Freedom Day

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A resolution recently introduced in both chambers of Congress would designate Jan. 16, 1993, as "Religious Freedom Day."

At a March 31 press conference, Rep. Thomas Bliley, R-Va., said he introduced the resolution (H.J. Res. 457) for two reasons: "The purpose of this resolution is not only to celebrate every American's religious freedom as established in the Bill of Rights, but also to recognize the document that served as the precursor to, and the greatest influence on, the Bill of Rights -- the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom."

On Jan. 16, 1786, the Virginia General Assembly adopted the statute written by Thomas Jefferson.

"This statute gives the natural right of religion precedence over the interests of the state, thereby completely dividing the church and state and allowing each individual to worship in a way in which he or she feels proper," Bliley said.

He added, "The freedom of religion has not always existed as we are used to it today, and I believe that we need to recognize this document that changed the course of history forever."

Responding to a question about a 1990 Supreme Court decision that makes it easier for government to restrict religious practice, Bliley told Associated Baptist Press that "religious freedom in America is as well as ever."

However, Rep. George Allen, R-Va., said the high court's 1990 Smith decision was unfortunate. In that decision, the court abandoned the "compelling state interest" test government must meet before restricting religious practice. Allen, a resolution co-sponsor, said legislation designed to restore that standard is pending in Congress.

"We applaud Mr. Bliley's resolution, but with all due respect, he is woefully misinformed about the state of religious freedom in America," said Oliver Thomas, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee. "Dozens of cases have been decided against churches and religious organizations since the Supreme Court gutted the free-exercise clause in Employment Division vs. Smith.

"We hope the congressman will join 173 of his colleagues in co-sponsoring the most important bill for religious liberty since Mr. Jefferson's statute was enacted," said Thomas, referring to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Sen. John Warner, R-Va., introduced a resolution similar to Bliley's in the Senate on the same day (S.J. Res. 283).

Resolutions express the sentiment of a congressional chamber but do not have the power of law.

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-- By Pam Parry

President proclaims May 7  
as National Day of Prayer

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President George Bush has proclaimed May 7, 1992, as a National Day of Prayer, urging all Americans to pray in thanksgiving and for God's continued blessing.

In his presidential proclamation, Bush wrote, "As we seek to chart a proper course in a world that is changing by the hour, our observance of a National Day of Prayer reminds us that we can always place our trust in the steady, unfailing light that is the love of God."

Bush added: "Our ancestors trusted in the faithfulness of the Almighty, and they frequently turned to him in humble, heartfelt prayer.... Today we know that their trust was well placed; their faith, richly rewarded. The great American experiment in liberty and self-government has not only endured but prospered."

A National Day of Prayer has been an annual tradition since April 17, 1952, when Congress approved a joint resolution calling for the designation of a specific day of prayer. The first Thursday in May each year has been set aside for that purpose.

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-- By Pam Parry

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