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Pastors propose severing
all ties with Furman

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee

By Greg Warner

COLUMBIA, S.C. (ABP) -- A bipartisan group of 34 South Carolina pastors has proposed that the South Carolina Baptist Convention sever all ties with Furman University rather than take the school to court to try to win back control of Furman's trustee board.

The pastors, saying they represent "a diversity of theological beliefs" among South Carolina Baptists, asked for a special meeting of the state convention "at the earliest possible date" to end the 165-year relationship between the Greenville school and Baptists in the state.

Although such a process would take more than a month and require the approval of several groups, leaders on both sides of the dispute said the proposal has a good chance of succeeding.

"We just don't see another viable option," said Michael Hamlet, one of four pastors who announced the plan at a press conference April 6 in Columbia, S.C.

"This is the only way," said Robert Shrum of Rock Hill, who chaired an earlier committee that tried to give Furman more autonomy while preserving the historic relationship.

Furman officials agreed, saying it is time for the school and convention to part ways.

"Since Furman and the convention have both suffered during this dispute, I can understand how it would be best if the institutions can agree to a friendly separation," said Furman President John Johns in a prepared statement.

"We believe it would be in the best interest of both institutions to acknowledge that we cannot turn back the clock and resume the same relationship we had in the past," trustee chairwoman Minor Mickle said in a prepared statement.

The dispute between the university and convention appeared headed to court April 1 after a second convention-appointed committee reported it had "reached an impasse" in attempts to negotiate an out-of-court settlement

between the school and convention. Neither party was willing to relinquish the power to elect trustees -- a power the convention held for 164 years until Furman's 25 trustees assumed that power for themselves in 1990.

South Carolina Baptists narrowly voted last November to sue the university in order to regain control. But Furman supporters promised to seek a court injunction to prevent spending Baptist money on a lawsuit. A court battle seemed inevitable when the latest convention committee announced a compromise was impossible.

The pastors' proposal is intended to get the dispute "off dead center," said Hamlet, pastor of First Baptist Church of North Spartanburg and a leader among South Carolina fundamental-conservatives.

A long and costly court battle "would consume much of the energy and resources of South Carolina Baptists for years to come," the pastors' statement warned. Church contributions to the state convention have dropped significantly during the dispute. "...We have come together to state that if the South Carolina Baptist Convention pursues legal action against Furman University, we all lose," the statement said.

"A lot of people have come around to this point of view," Hamlet explained. Although a majority of people attending the 1991 state convention voted to sue the school, Hamlet said a plan that keeps the convention out of court better represents the current feelings of Baptists in the state. "We see (now) how complicated this can be," he said.

Both Shrum, pastor of Oakland Baptist Church in Rock Hill, and Hamlet said the pastors' proposal has a good chance of winning approval.

"I don't like it," said Shrum of the plan to sever ties with Furman. "I gave a whole year (as chairman of the 1990 committee) trying to preserve the relationship. But given the numbers and the psychology of the moment, this is the only option left -- besides going to court. So, I support this with a tear in my eye."

The pastors' proposal would not only surrender convention control of trustee elections but end the convention's financial support of the school. The convention contributes about \$1.6 million a year to Furman, but that accounts for only 3 percent of the school's budget.

The plan calls for the executive committee of the convention's General Board to call a special session of the board, which in turn would ask the convention president to call a special session of the state convention, which otherwise would not meet until November.

Although convention president Eddie Greene of Anderson is not obligated to heed the General Board's call for a special convention, he told Associated Baptist Press April 6 he will go along if the board requests it. A special convention could convene as early as the end of May, he said.

Although previously opposed to a special session, Greene said it would be preferable to waiting until November. "We want to get this thing settled," he said.

Greene, pastor of New Prospect Baptist Church in Anderson, said the convention would have a "good, strong legal position" if the matter went to court, but he said severing ties would be better than legal action.

Greene described the pastors' proposal as "a good coming together" of Baptists with differing views. "I hope it will set a precedent for the entire convention," he added.

Severing ties would not prevent Furman and the convention from "finding ways to work together" in the future, the pastors' statement said.

The statement also called for a special committee to recommend any needed changes in the state convention's relationships with other agencies "in light of the actions of Furman University." Such changes could prevent other state institutions from following Furman's lead in seeking more

autonomy.

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Three seminaries to offer alumni events at Fellowship

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Although none of the six Southern Baptist seminaries will officially be represented at the general assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship later this month, three seminaries will have exhibits and functions for alumni.

Southern, Southwestern and Midwestern Baptist Theological seminaries said April 7 their alumni associations will sponsor exhibits and auxiliary meetings during the April 30-May 2 assembly in Fort Worth, Texas.

Southern Baptist leaders have persuaded most agencies not to be represented at the meeting because the Fellowship encourages churches to bypass normal denominational channels with mission funds. However, most of the Fellowship's funds end up in SBC agency coffers anyway.

Midwestern and Southern will hold separate fellowships for alumni Friday night, May 1, at the Ramada Inn following the evening session of the assembly. Southwestern, based in Fort Worth, will host a continental breakfast at the Ramada Inn Saturday, May 2, at 7 a.m.

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary cancelled plans for a booth at the request of SBC leaders, despite an earlier vote by seminary trustees to go to the meeting.

Seminary President Landrum Leavell told Associated Baptist Press there are not enough New Orleans alumni in Texas to justify representation at the meeting, adding, "That was the only basis under which I would go anyway." Leavell said the seminary has not received a request from alumni for representation at the meeting.

Additionally, the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, the new moderate-conservative school, will host a luncheon May 1 at 12:15 p.m. at the Clarion Hotel. Transportation will be provided for the \$10 luncheon.

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-- By Greg Warner

Abortion debate must first deal with sexuality, Texas panel says

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Before Christians can respond redemptively to all parties concerned in abortions, the church must first deal maturely with the subject of sexuality, a panel of experts told the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

The commission and its board of consultants discussed abortion-related issues at an April 2-3 retreat near Dallas as part of the process of drafting a new position paper on the issue. The CLC is the moral concerns and public policy agency of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

"It is certainly possible in the near future that Roe vs. Wade will be partially, if not completely, overturned by the Supreme Court," said Phil Strickland, director of the Texas CLC. "If so, decisions that have previously been made at the national level will increasingly be made at the

state level. It is time for the commission to take another look at the issue."

In the past, Strickland added, the Texas CLC produced literature in partnership with its national counterpart, the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, but that partnership approach is not followed as much as in the past.

While not ignoring the public-policy aspects of the abortion debate, Strickland noted: "If abortions were outlawed tomorrow, it would not mean an end to abortions, only an end to legal abortions. The ultimate decisions about abortions are not made in the courts and legislatures, but by individual women and the pastors and others who counsel them."

Commission members discussed at length the proposed draft for a new position paper -- or papers -- on abortion. A completed statement, which may be released either in a single document or a series of brochures, should be completed within several months.

Although discussion of the manuscript was conducted under background rules that preclude direct quotes, Strickland told Associated Baptist Press the emphasis was on preventing crisis pregnancies and promoting healthy Christian sexuality rather than precise public-policy formulas.

"The feeling expressed was that the commission could make its strongest impact by helping people develop a Christian view of sexuality and a Christian view of reverence for life and by helping to equip pastors to assist people in making responsible decisions about sexuality and abortion," he said.

Strickland said the commission will "continue to take a conservative posture" on public policy regarding abortions, supporting abortions only in "extreme circumstances." However, commissioners did not reach a clear definition of what constitutes "extreme circumstances."

Prior to considering any statement, the commission heard perspectives on the abortion issue from a panel of three men and two women who discussed the personal, spiritual, ethical, medical and societal ramifications of the abortion debate.

Baylor University professor Dan McGee said abortion is a critical issue in the United States today because it is inextricably tied to other key societal issues, such as the technological revolution in medicine, economic and environmental matters related to the population crunch, and changing views regarding gender roles.

"We come out of a long history in which males owned the bodies of their women," said McGee, professor of ethics at the Waco, Texas, school. "The woman belonged to the man for purposes of sexual gratification and for childbearing -- to provide him with children who could work the fields and carry on the family name. That's a very ancient tradition that only quite recently has been challenged in a significant way."

"It is important to understand the feelings of women when working on the abortion issue, recognizing why the right to control their reproductive cells is so central to their feeling of freedom," he said.

Churches wishing to deal with the abortion issue intelligently must first confront cultural myths linking sex to conquest and power, McGee said. "We must recover an understanding of sexuality that stresses the potentiality for creating life and nurturing relationships," he said.

Brenda Wilson of Austin, Texas, recounted how guilt and fear of displeasing her father drove her to have an abortion at age 18.

"At that point, I would have done anything -- legal or illegal -- to dispense with the problem," she said, recalling how unthinkable it would have been to confront the truth in a home where sexuality was never discussed.

"The very same attitude that tells you it's wrong to have an abortion

is the very same attitude that drove me to have one," she said. "I had to hide it at all costs. I didn't want to inconvenience anyone."

For ten years, she suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder that manifested itself in anxiety attacks, nightmares and family tensions, Wilson said. Only through pastoral, psychological and group counseling and through the healing power of God has she begun to find peace, she said.

Wilson expressed disgust with profit-motivated, impersonal abortion clinics and dismay at the guilt-inducing methods used in some crisis-pregnancy clinics. She called for competent counseling with women facing crisis pregnancies.

"In a sense, I have been naked before you," Wilson concluded. "In closing, I would encourage all of you to be naked before one another, yourself and God. The leaf we use to hide our shame or true selves is no longer needed through Christ."

Travis Berry, longtime pastor and member of the institutional ethics committee at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas, said: "Abortion is an issue with pain on every side of it. So many glib answers are offered by people who don't have to deal with these problems. Glib and superficial answers just aren't enough."

Berry, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, said the abortion issue offers Christians an opportunity to take a fresh look at the meaning of life from a different perspective.

"I'm not talking about a technical definition of life and when it begins, but rather an understanding of life as a gift and a call to respond to the stewardship of that gift," Berry said.

Kris Olson of Waco, emphasized that those who lobby for the abolition of abortion based on their reverence for life should likewise lobby for value-based sex education, financial support for poor single mothers, and the ready availability of contraceptive devices.

"We must make pregnancy prevention methods available to all women -- rich and poor, educated and uneducated," she said.

Paul Payne, an obstetrician-gynecologist and member of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, expressed his personal opposition to abortions except when the mother is endangered or when the fetus has conditions incompatible with life.

"However, there is no way to fit every case into the same mold," he said, adding that issues of neglect and abandonment after birth also must be a part of any discussion.

"We need to talk about what will happen to the baby further down the line," he said.

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Senate votes to lift ban
on fetal-tissue research

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Senate approved a bill April 2 that would lift a ban on federally funded research using fetal tissue from induced abortions.

The four-year-old ban has been supported by the Reagan and Bush administrations because officials say the research would encourage abortions. However, ban opponents say the moratorium has stopped promising research on the treatment of Parkinson's disease, juvenile diabetes, Alzheimer's disease and other genetic disorders.

The Senate approved the bill (H.R. 2507) by a 87-10 vote. The U.S.

House of Representatives approved a similar measure 274-144 in July. President Bush has promised to veto any measure that reduces abortion protections; he has yet to have one of his 27 vetoes overridden.

The provision lifting the ban, which is part of a bill reauthorizing the National Institutes of Health, would fund research in several areas, including women's health, cancer and AIDS.

During debate, some pro-life senators said fetal-tissue research is not an abortion issue.

Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., said: "I have been and continue to be a supporter of efforts to limit abortion in this country. . . . This is not a debate about abortion. This is a debate about allowing federally sponsored research that will serve humanity and may save thousands of lives."

Thurmond pointed to the safeguards in H.R. 2507 that are designed to ensure women make the decision for abortion independent from the decision to donate fetal tissue.

Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., said he stood before the Senate "unabashedly pro-life" but firmly in favor of lifting the ban. After talking with medical researchers, Hatfield concluded fetal-tissue transplants hold the promise of saving lives and such research will not promote abortion.

"I believe every member should pose the question: Should we allow this tissue to be discarded rather than seize the opportunity to support life and provide hope for the millions of people who suffer from Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, Parkinson's disease, and other genetic disorders?" Hatfield said.

"I believe the truly pro-life position on this issue is that of supporting fetal-tissue research," he added.

But not all senators agreed.

Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, emphasized the administration's ban is very narrow, applying only to research that involves human fetal tissue from induced abortions, not spontaneous abortions or ectopic pregnancies. The ban also does not impact private research, Hatch noted.

Hatch said he favors fetal-tissue research from sources that no one could find morally or ethically objectionable. He offered an amendment that would have established a fetal-tissue registry and bank to help promote fetal-tissue research while limiting it to tissue from miscarriages and ectopic pregnancies. The Hatch amendment was defeated 23-77.

Another amendment that would merely establish a fetal-tissue registry and bank for tissue, including that obtained from induced abortions, was adopted by a voice vote.

Two other adopted amendments dealt with surveys of sexual behavior. The Senate approved (51-46) an amendment to prohibit federal funding of surveys of adult and teenage sexual behavior previously proposed and withdrawn by the Department of Health and Human Services. Another amendment, approved 57-40, would allow other sex surveys only after appropriate review.

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Maryland notes history
of religious freedom

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A recent celebration reminded Marylanders that religious freedom was the driving force behind their state's colonization in 1634, said a Baptist congressman March 26.

Rep. Steny Hoyer, D-Md., told members of the U.S. House of Representatives that Maryland Day commemorated the day Europeans first colonized the state, reminding Marylanders of the religious freedom sought by the colonists.

Some 200 colonists traveled more than 3,000 miles from England to St. Clement's Island in the middle of the Potomac, Hoyer recounted. Although peaceful co-existence among religious groups was not the norm in England, the colony's founder, George Calvert, wanted to ensure religious tolerance, Hoyer said.

"Maryland Day is really a celebration of the principle of religious tolerance, and the important role that Maryland has played in laying down the idea as one of our country's founding beliefs," said Hoyer, a longtime member of Broadview Baptist Church in Temple Hills, Md., who is attending Hughesville Baptist Church since moving to a new district.

"After all, if it were not for the promise of religious freedom, it is unlikely that this country would have attracted the ambitious and freedom-loving people it did," Hoyer said.

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-- By Pam Parry

BJC lawyer opposes plan to use tax dollars for religious schools

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Taxing citizens to pay for the teaching of religion betrays both religious liberty and sound public policy, a Baptist church-state specialist told an interdenominational gathering here April 6.

Addressing the annual conference sponsored by Interfaith Impact for Justice and Peace, Brent Walker, associate general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee, criticized the Bush administration's so-called educational "choice" proposal that would provide vouchers to help parents send children to private schools, most of which are sectarian.

"The question for us today is not whether I can choose to send my kids to private or parochial schools," Walker said. "Of course, I have that right. The question is whether I should be able to choose you (other taxpayers) to help me pay for it.

"The answer to that question is no."

Walker said seeking vouchers to pay for private education is an attempt to avoid support for public education.

"The public schools, like public streets, libraries and hospitals, benefit all citizens whether or not we actually use them," he said.

"Parents who decide not to use the public schools for their child's education are no more entitled to relief than persons who decide not to use the public library or hospital."

Walker said even the most generous voucher plan would not provide enough funds for low-income families to pay private school tuition. "For them, 'choice' is a cruel joke," he said.

The "choice" elements of the administration plan have been rejected by the Senate and face an uncertain, if not doubtful, future in the House of Representatives.

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-- By Larry Chesser

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EDITOR'S NOTE: ABP is covering the trustee meetings at Midwestern Seminary and the Foreign Mission Board this week. Stories will be available Thursday. Also we will have a story on the decision by Binkley Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, N.C., to ordain a homosexual.

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